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BALANCED NEWS, FEARLESS VIEWS

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No more 'Little Mister and Miss Kuligligs' contests

By Dona Z. Pazzibugan

Peso breaks into 54 level

US fund to keep on investing in country

By Doris C. Dumlao and Michelle V. Ramos

THE PESO yesterday broke into the 54 level against the US dollar for the first time since October 2003 on a string of favorable news such as the 6.3-percent economic growth last year and the country's fresh chance to stay on the list of investment sites of the biggest US pension fund.

The peso was the sole gainer in Asia as expectations the G7 will once again issue a dull, familiar message calling for global currency flexibility weighed on regional currencies.

The peso surged to a 15-month high of 53.87 before closing at 53 against the greenback.

It opened at 53.08 and hit an intra-day low of 53.68 before breaching the 54 barrier.

"When the 10:41 level was breached, it triggered further selling of dollars on expectation that it will appreciate some more," said Jonathan Ravelas, chief market strategist at Banco de Oro Universal Bank.

The $464.5-million volume at the Philippine Dealing System yesterday was one of the highest seen in the aftermath of the 1997 Asian currency crisis.

Upon closing at 53 to the dollar, the local currency gained 9 centavos despite some technical correction.

"The uptrend is still due to equity flows. Some investment arms to be examining due to the recent tax measures being passed. Favorable economic data, good international reserves and OFW

AGENDA FOR PEACE. President Arroyo oversees the National Security Council in Sweden to tackle the peace talks with the MILF set to start this month in Kuala Lumpur. The President is flanked by, from left, NSC Deputy retired Gen. Victor Nieto, Presidential Adviser on Mindanao Jiggs Duroza, Executive Secretary Eduardo Ermita, National Security Adviser Ekkehart and Justice Secretary Gonzales.

THE UP and down saga of the Philippine peso over a period of 11 months.

Solons want IPPs, lawyers, docs to pay VAT

By Cynthia D. Balana, Juliet Labog-Javellana and Ed C. Cabuenagan Jr.

A POWERFUL congressional body yesterday lowered the boom on the earnings of doctors, lawyers and independent power producers.

In a four-hour executive session, the House committee on ways and means agreed to clip them with the proposed 10-percent value-added tax, removing their previous exemptions, in order to raise P13.3 billion in new money for the government.

The committee also lifted the exemption previously given to the sale and importation of raw materials used in the manufacture of petroleum products.

The committee action is still subject to plenary debates and voting before the House version is transmitted to the Senate.

It's final: SC upholds Mining Act

By Philip C. Tubeza

HAPPY days are here again for the mining magnates.

The Supreme Court yesterday denied "with finality" a motion asking the tribunal to reverse its ruling that limited the allowable foreign mining firms to exploit the country's natural resources.

The high court said the La Bugal-Blaan Tribal Association and other groups failed to raise new issues in the motion for reconsideration that they filed on Jan. 20.

"After a thorough deliberation on

Critics to GMA: What growth? Growth for whom?

NOT EVERYONE is ecstatic over the 6.1-percent growth in the gross domestic product (GDP) in 2004.

It's like "a balloon that will eventually burst," Rep. Rafael Mariano of the militant party-list group Anakpawis said yesterday.

He said the economic growth's foundation was "very weak" because it was based, not on production, but largely on telecommunications—mainly call centers and mobile phone services—massive election spending, and the remittances of overseas Filipino workers.

Mariano also said the agriculture and industry sectors remained backward because of the prevailing export-oriented and import-dependent character and orientation of the economy.

Senator Bayan Jr., secretary general of the Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, pointed out that the benefits of the increased GDP had yet to reach the poor. "There's another side to the rosy economic picture painted by government statistics. Millions remain unemployed, underemployed or barely earning enough to make ends meet. The purported growth can in fact

from addressing the real issues."

The National Statistics Coordination Board (NSCB) had said the 6.06 growth last year was the highest since the 6.2 percent registered in 1997, and well above the 4.7 percent recorded in 2003.

Repentant tree cutter, 7 other witnesses vs loggers

By Rob Cuaresma and Julier Luking Javellana

A REPENTANT tree cutter who lost his three children and parents-in-law to the killer floods that hit Aurora has threatened to expose in public the "evil" he did.

Jaime "Jun" Gumodoc has agreed to go to the witness stand in Senator Ramon "Bong" Revilla Jr.'s Senate Blue Ribbon committee hearing on illegal logging.

Gumodoc is one of eight witnesses who have agreed to testify before the committee after big-time illegal loggers, Defensor mill lords Ceferino Roxas and seven other "upperstream" rebels the Department of Environment and Natural Resources files charges today against some 40 persons, including businessmen and barangay officials.

Among the witnesses, Defensor took special note of Roxas, in his affidavit, recalled in Filipino: "Because of the calamity, I lost my three children and my parents-in-law. They were swept away by the floods and have not been found since."

The charges will be for violations of Presidential Decree No. 705, or the Revised Forestry Code of the Philippines, in the

Governors angry, gang up on Miriam

By Pia Hinahon and Sandhivers Lauren Burmeo

A BROADSIDE outside Sen. Miriam Defensor Santiago's privilege speech on Monday assailing top local officials for supposedly doing nothing to stop illegal logging in their provinces.

Sen. Loi

Police chief rattles skeletons in media closets

By Christian V. Esguerra

A PROVINCIAL police chief who allegedly once thrashed an average student for not knowing the answer to a question in class now threatens media practitioners with libel suits if they write stories that he considers unfair.

Chief Supt. Nestor Fajardo, director of the Police Regional Office in Central Luzon, has also warned media practitioners in Pampanga province that he will not hesitate to file libel charges against them if they write stories that tarnish his reputation.

"Here, they think they are king. What they want, they always get," Cabanatuan Mayor Julius Vergara said in a phone interview from his headquarters in Davao.

Vergara said Fajardo's threat to sue media practitioners was "unfair" because "we are not criminals."

Vergara urged media groups like the National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) to police their own ranks and "educate" journalists to keep them off illegal activities.

Corruption and involvement

NUJP president Inday Espina-Varona said professionalizing the media was exactly what her organization was doing.

"We're going around the country conducting seminars for these [practitioners]. Part of the norm

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005

Second FRONTPAGE

WEATHER FORECAST

Another bank in hot water for ₱8-B scam

By Doris C. Dumlao

STANDARD Chartered Bank, the oldest foreign bank in the country, was yesterday accused by Sen. Juan Ponce Enrile of defrauding "almost a thousand" local investors through the alleged sale of ₱8 billion in unregistered securities.

In a privilege speech at the Senate, Enrile also called for the probe and prosecution of government officials who he said allegedly coddled the British-based bank, which he also accused of cheating the government of about ₱850 million in unpaid taxes.

One of the government officials that Enrile identified was the former acting justice secretary Merceditas Gutierrez, now presidential legal counsel and chair of the Presidential Anti-Graft Commission, whom he accused of facilitating the sale [with the security of a Standard Chartered executive who was facing a criminal case here in connection with the bank's sale of the unregistered securities.

"It seems that this bank has no respect for our laws or the institutions that we have created to implement our laws and safeguard our people... it also seems that our institutions lack either the willful power and have not served our purposes, and remedial legislation may be necessary to solve this problem," said Enrile, who is vice chair of the committee on banks and financial institutions.

Unregistered securities

The unregistered securities that Standard Chartered allegedly sold were high-risk foreign mutual funds, "falsely advertised and marketed as safe investments here, but out [foreign residence and local nationals]," claimed Enrile.

The senator cited a list of prominent people on whom Standard had allegedly sold the trust instruments and would soon be summoned to testify.

They included incoming Finance Secretary Cesar Purisima, who reportedly invested $40,000 and Washington Sycip, founder of Sycip Gorres Velayo & Co. auditing firm which both Sycip and Purisima chaired at different times.

Other alleged victims were former Interior secretary Luis Santos, a former mayor of Cebu City who reportedly invested $50,000, and the Claret School and Asilum de Manila which reportedly invested their pension funds.

The most detailed case cited by Enrile was that of lawyer Mark Borromeo, a grandson of the late Jorge Bocobo, the legal scholar and former dean of the University of the Philippines College of Law. Borromeo said he has ₱100,000 in time placements which he had placed with Standard Chartered in January 2000.

High-risk investments

"Contrary to Standard Chartered Bank's representations that the funds they marketed were a safe haven, it turned out that they were high-risk investments which were heavily placed in 'technology stocks' and other stocks in the United States and Europe, which by the time had already been declining," Bocobo said in a letter to Enrile.

"This is contrary to the bank's proposal to me that the foreign mutual funds were heavy weighting on long-term government securities (USTbs)" or "almost underlying investments are government bonds and prime commercial loans," Bocobo said.

Enrile invoked the British Bank of Indochina Republic Act 77221, which had liberalized the entry and scope of operations of foreign banks in the country.

Reynaldo Gutierrez, counsel of Standard Chartered, yesterday released this short statement on Enrile's speech: "This is not a new issue and has been raised in a number of occasions over the last two years, where Standard Chartered Bank has been faced with no wrongdoing. However, I am not aware of any case filed against the bank by SEC Mark R. Bocobo, a statement stressed.

"Standard Chartered Bank is the oldest foreign bank in the Philippines, servicing bank more than 132 years and as such, continues to observe Philippine laws and regulations," he said.

Since 1873

Standard Chartered has been in the country since 1872 when it opened for business as the Chartered Bank. Standard Chartered resulted from the merger in 1969 of the Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China and the Standard Bank of British South Africa.

Enrile said the bank had started selling the foreign securities in 1996, packaged in a "Global Third Party Mutual Fund" and which were not registered with the SEC.

Enrile said the Somelo Mahardhika Brantomurtono Sejati & Bebas Angeles law firm, which had aided the bank in this operation, should also be investigated.

Enrile and lawyer Francisco Chavez, a former solicitor general, had filed a criminal case of estafa against the bank's board members and officers in June 2003, but nothing came of it.

"Instead, almost all the persons charged, many of whom are non-residents foreigners, have left the country, while the criminal case was pending against them," he said, and accused Gutierrez of being one of the officials who had abandoned it.

Gutierrez appeared unnerved when she faced Maharlika reporters yesterday to deny Enrile's charges.

'Wrong information'

"I don't know where Senator Enrile got his wrong information, but I'm not taking what he said it against him. I'm willing to talk to him," said Gutierrez, her eyes teeming and her voice cracking.

She explained that it was former Justice Secretary Simeon Datumanong who had issued and later lifted the hold departure order.

Gutierrez said she merely allowed the Standard Chartered executives to leave for Singapore in 2003 despite the HDO to attend a "very important meeting of their operating officers," a decision that she made with the concurrence of the then Senate president and sometimes that the bank executives would return.

She said the Standard Chartered executives returned after the sessions but that she had no way of knowing if they were still in the country.

Gutierrez said she was all for "justice being served" in this case.

In an interview, Chavez said he believed former justice undersecretary Manuel Teehankee, who is now in Geneva as the country's representative to the World Trade Organization, should also be summoned to explain. Teehankee is a former partner of the Bautista Mahardika law office. With reports from Michael Lim Ubac and Gil C. Cabacungan Jr.

A3

WEATHER FORECAST

Defensor rapped over watershed resort

By Armand N. Nocum

A CONCERNED citizen has filed a graft case against Environment Secretary Michael Defensor for his alleged failure to implement an order enjoining a private individual from the Marikina Watershed Reservation and dismantling the "resort" the latter had illegally erected there.

In a three-page complaint, Bibiano Francisco, of Greenbird Village, Kamuning, Pasig, said Defensor was guilty for Felix Martinez had abused the terms of the land in the water reservation, resulting in flooding in Metro Manila.

"Martinez built a resort in the Marikina watershed that caused flooding in Metro Manila," said Francisco in his complaint dated Jan. 27.

Francisco faulted Defensor for failing to implement a "notice to vacate" issued by Oscar Ferrer, head of the Community Environment and Natural Resources Office (CENRO) based in Antipolo in February 2004.

Addressed to Martinez, the notice said that after investigation by the DENR, it was found that the "developments and infrastructure" Martinez undertook on a 6,000-square-meter lot, Sitio Cabading, San Jose, Antipolo "encroaches the Marikina Watershed Reservation."

"In view of the above, you are hereby instructed to vacate the area and dismantle all the improvements introduced thereon within 15 days of receipt hereof," read Ferrer's February 2004 order.

According to Tamayo, the order was never implemented, prompting him to write Defensor—through his lawyer Oliver Lozano—on July 19 to "immediately implement the notice to vacate" issued by Ferrer.

But no order came, he said.

Speaking through an aide, Defensor said he had issued a memorandum ordering the dismantling of the illegal structure on Jan. 25.

The document called and sent text messages to Defensor, but it was his head executive assistant Beth Medrano who replied, saying Defensor was on a closed door meeting in Malacañang.

Malaysia extends amnesty for Pinoy illegals

By Jerome Aning, Carlos Pabla and TJ Burgonio

THE MALAYSIAN immigration authorities have extended for another week an amnesty period for illegal aliens, giving the Philippine government more time to repatriate some 170,000 undocumented Filipinos who remain there.

Labor Undersecretary Manuel Imson yesterday said Datin Lampas agreed to postpone the looming crackdown on illegal aliens upon Manila's request, which was relayed by Philippine Embassy officials.

The official appealed to the illegals staying Filipinos, particularly those in Sabah, Malaysia, to get travel documents and return to the Philippines before Feb. 8.

"We believe that we already have a sizeable number of undocumented workers there so we are proceeding with the repatriation program for the purpose of documenting them," he told reporters.

Imson said that those who would volunteer to return home will be allowed to go back to Malaysia after they are given proper documentation.

He warned that Malaysia had activated a 600,000-"Rapidus"-Volunteers Corps, which would help the government hunt down illegals. The members of the corps, who are civilians' citizens, would be rewarded 100 ringgit (about P1,000) for each undocumented migrant arrested.

Police, immigration and civilian volunteers were supposed to start raids on migrant hideouts on Monday, the last day of a four-month amnesty program that allowed illegal foreign workers to leave Malaysia without being prosecuted.

However, the Malaysian Ministry of Home Affairs suspended the crackdown "pending further notice," upon the request of the Philippines, Indonesia and the United States, Department of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Gilberto Asuncion said yesterday.

Echoing labor officials, Noe Dean, executive director of the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers' Affairs, however, said the crackdown was suspended for "at least a week and [until] no notice."

According to Amapur, of the estimated 170,000 undocumented Filipinos in Sabah, only 7,500 have obtained travel documents, and only 6,000 have departed for Manila.

Imson said more Filipinos could have left but did not bother to get travel documents as they were traveling to Mindanao by sea.

The Jan. 31 deadline was the second extension granted by Malaysia since it launched the amnesty program in October last year. The program's goal was to encourage some 1.2 million illegal workers to come out in the open and leave without penalty.

In view of the expected mass deportation, Foreign Secretary Alberto Romulo recently formed last month the Philippine Inter-Agency Task Force to ensure "a smooth repatriation" of the illegal aliens.

The contingency measures include sending Navy ships to Sabah to transport the deportees home and posting a team each at the departure point in Sabah and at the arrival point in Tawi-Tawi to assist the deportees.

Task force

In a related development, Rep. Antonio Alvarez (Bataan, Bataan) yesterday called for the creation of an inter-agency task force—to include doctors and nurses—which would be deployed across the country's southern borders to accept and process Filipino deportees from Malaysia.

"A reception committee should be set up in Iloilo, Bataan, Zamboanga City and other provinces near the Malaysian state of Sabah from where most of the estimated 350,000 Filipino undocumented workers in Sabah, Malaysia, are expected to come from," Alvarez said.

He said the task force should be composed of personnel from the Departments of Health, Social Welfare, National Defense, Foreign Affairs and Local Government.

In calling for the creation of a task force, Alvarez was speaking in behalf of Pakatan which experienced the influx of Vietnamese refugees in the late 1970s. With reports from AFP and AFP

Bishops support curbs on Japayukis

By Blancher S. Rivera

MANILA: The result of opinion interviews, Filipino bishops yesterday came out in support of Japan's new immigration law that would severely limit the number of entertainers performers who would be allowed to enter that country.

The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines assured Japanese immigration officials of its support in a meeting before the CBCP plenary assembly that concluded on Jan. 23.

The four Japanese officials explained the new law and presented an "action plan" for the Philippine Catholic Church to follow with regard to it.

The CBCP said the stricter law to be implemented this year would be highly effective against the trafficking of Filipino women who end up as sex workers in Japan.

There are some 80,000 Filipino entertainers currently in Japan. Together, they send home some P1 billion annually.

The Philippines, meanwhile, made a final appeal to Japan on Tuesday to defer the new visa rule on entertainers.

The government's Office of External Affairs called for a two- and-a-half year transition period to allow Filipino artists who want to work in Japan to adjust to the new rule.

Manila had earlier asked Tokyo for a five-year postponement. But Masaru Watanabe, minister for general affairs at the Japanese Embassy in Manila, last week said guidelines on the new visa policy had been approved and would be implemented "very soon."

With an AFP report

Corrections

IN THE JAN. 29 issue, a March story on Pope AJPs—Vatican heroes and role clash with Nueva Ecija—misstated the name of the Vatican City mayor. The mayor is Alfredo Comma... and Colonna.

* * *

IN THE Jan. 29 issue, a story on the front page—"Pinoys make do with low"—misquoted the Social Weather Stations survey in saying that "most Filipinos considered a more authoritarian government." The SWS actually reported that "Though only 48 percent are satisfied with how democracy works, most Filipinos prefer it to authoritarianism." Fifty-seven percent of Filipinos preferred democracy, while 24 percent preferred an authoritarian government, according to the survey.

* * *

IN THE JAN. 29 issue, a story on Page A4—"Civilians abuse Filipino rebels, says Amiel team"—erroneously stated that Fr. Benigno Beltran, S.J. is the current Jesuit provincial superior. Interagan was replaced by Fr. Daniel Patrick Huang, S.J., last year.

* * *

Readers may send their requests for corrections of factual errors or omissions to Gerry Arcel, city editor, Philippine Daily Inquirer, 185 Absolut Chino Roces Avenue corner Makati's Ave., Makati City; fax Nos. 892-0135/896-6214; e-mail address: inq@inquirer.net.ph; or e-mail to inq@mail.inquirer.net.ph.

Complainants whose lack of full name or identification may be sent to Ricci Palafox, readers' advocate, the same address and fax numbers as those of the city editor, and e-mail address: rpalafox@mail.com.ph.

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Notice is hereby given to the public that the following unaccounted/outstanding receipts (OR) of the policy/ies temporary receipt (OR/TR), which have been declared lost by various agents or which could not be retrieved from insurance representatives/field reports, are hereby declared null and void and of no force and effect.

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Aussie mining firms eyeing deals in RP, says ambassador

By Gerthrudiz R. Licuanan
PDI Mindanao Bureau

DAVAO CITY—Australian mining firms are among the foreign investors excited over the prospects of the Philippine mining industry, some of them already eyeing deals with local mining companies in the mining conference in Manila scheduled for this month, Australian Ambassador Bash Suarez told reporters.

Peace and normal Australian mining firms, including Indophil Resources, which has a 40-percent stake in the Sagittarius copper-gold project in Tampakan, South Cotabato, were already looking forward to the mining fair.

Peace said the Supreme Court ruling, which opened the country's mining sector to foreign investors, and the recent entry of the Northern Territory (NT) in the East Asian Growth Area (Eaga), were very encouraging to Australian firms, which had been testing the country the past years.

"We're mainly into mining and several Australian companies are excited over the prospects," Peace said. "We're talking here of environmentally responsible mining, with established records in Northern Territory."

Aside from Indophil Resources NL, Sagittarius' Australian partner, which has a 40 per cent stake in the Tampakan project, MW Hill, not to also among those expected to join the mining fair and conference, Peace said.

MW Hillion has an interest in the Pujada nickel project, considered one of the country's largest mining projects. The company is also eyeing more investments in nickel in Surigao, according to Suarez.

The gross value of some 200 million metric tons of 0.3 percent nickel reserves in the Pujada project, which is run by Asiatico MW Hillion, is estimated at $222.69 billion, according to data from the Mines and Geosciences Bureau (MGB).

The Tampakan copper project was by Sagittarius Mines Inc. is estimated to contain 981 million dry metric tons (DMT) of (0.75 per cent) copper, valued at $14.4 billion.

Earlier, an MGB official said an Australian company, Phelps Dodge, was also eyeing a stake in the $6.2-billion Didipan copper project of North Davao Mining Corp.

Edilberto Seleza, mining operations officer of the MBG, said the government was looking for buyers for the 50-50 Davao-Antacon gold and copper project, which sits on the Mamas gold area of Compostela Valley.

Aside from Phelps Dodge of Australia, Cost Minerals Inc., the firm which operates the gold and copper project in Oroquieta, Misamis, is also doing due diligence on the government firm, documents said.

Peace said Australian mining companies were setting their eyes on the mining investments not only in Mindanao, but also in the Sulu Sea Growth Area (Ssga) with the recent inclusion of the Northern Territory (NT) in the Ssga.

Neither's Territory has been home to quite a number of big Australian mining firms, Peace said.

It's final: SC upholds Mining Act

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the motion, none of the members of this court have changed their opinions or votes," and the tribunal, which again voted 10-4.

In a four-page resolution, the court said "all the controversible aspects of this litigation—factual, constitutional, legal, philosophical, territorial, financial, ecological, environmental and technological—have all been extensively taken up and addressed during the country's lengthy and purposeful debate on said definitive issue."

The resolution affirmed the court's December ruling, which reversed a landmark decision of the high court on Jan. 27, 2004 that declared the Philippine Mining Act unconstitutional.

The motion initially stemmed from a case questioning the constitutionality of the 1995 Financial and Technical Assistance Agreement (FTAA) between the government and Western Mining Corp. Phils., a wholly owned subsidiary of the Australian firm, Western Mining Corp. Holdings Ltd.

Downturn

Lack of capital and laws barring foreign investment in mining companies had resulted in a downturn in the local mining industry with many potential deposits going undeveloped and many local mining companies shutting down their operations.

Militant, environmental and tribal groups, backed by the Catholic Church, had also opposed opening the mining industry to foreign investment.

However, the Supreme Court ruling last December reinvigorated international interest in the industry, with several new mining projects now in the pipeline.

Mineral exports, once a top dollar-earner, brought in only $638 million or about 0.8 per cent of total exports last year.

President Macapagal-Arroyo has made the revival of the mining industry one of her key tools in bolstering the country's economic growth.

Potential power

Mr. Arroyo said the Philippines had the potential to be "the fifth largest mining power in the world in terms of both deposits and output."

"We have huge gold reserves, fourth largest in copper, fifth in nickel and with chromite.

In its resolution yesterday, the court addressed the dissenting opinion of Justice Antonio Carpio, which criticized the liberating Law on implementing rules and regulations, and the FTAA for allegedly limiting "the government's share of the state from the mining profits of the foreign contractor."

The court said that while the mining law, the executive order, and the FTAA had been declared constitutional, Congress or the President "in the exercise of their powers, could still modify them." If indeed, in their opinion they are wanting or running in any respect."

The tribunal said the development of the country's mining industry was the responsibility of Congress or the executive branch.

"Let not this court interfere inordinately and unnecessarily," the court said.

Up to Congress, President

"The area of how much 'profit' the nation should or could derive from the exploration, development and utilization of the country's mineral resources is a policy matter, over which we 'must allow the President and Congress maximum discretion in using the resources of our country to secure for the immediate and future benefit of our people the full benefit of the great potential powers of our people and assure their cry for viable employment opportunities in the country," it added.

The justices who affirmed their previous ruling were Chief Justice Hilario Davide Jr., Ameurfina Panganiban, Reynato Puno, Leonardo Quisumbing, Angelina Sandoval-Gutierrez, Alicia Austria-Martinez, Renato Corona, Dante Tinga, Minita Chico-Nazario and Romeo Callejo Sr.

The four who dissented were Associate Justice Carpio, Consuelo Ynares-Santiago, Ruben Callejo and Conchita Carpio-Morales.

Associate Justice Adolfo Azcuna again abstained because he was a former counsel of the Mamarinal mining firm involved in the case.

The court previously voted 7-7 with one abstention in nullifying the mining law and all FTAAs.

Beneficial ownership

In its January 2004 ruling, the tribunal said that FTAAs were to last forever contracts in which the government in effect granted a foreign corporation "beneficial ownership over natural resources that are presently owned by the state and are intended for the benefit of its citizens."

The court ruled then that FTAAs were prohibited by the 1987 Constitution and were "antithetical to the principle of sovereignty because they allowed foreign mining companies control of resources in the patrimony of the Filipino people."

At the time the seven justices who voted to declare the Mining Act unconstitutional were Davide, Puno, Quisumbing, Carpio-Morales, Corona, Callejo and Tinga.

Ruling appealed

Those who upheld the law's constitutionality were Panganiban, Ynares-Santiago, Sandoval-Gutierrez and Austria-Martinez. Retired Associate Justice Jose Vitug wrote a separate opinion. Azcuna also abstained this time.

The government and Western Mining then appealed the ruling. With a report from AFP

PAF has 8 new generals

By Hilina Dizon

EIGHT officers of the Philippine Air Force, led by its vice commander, were recently promoted to the next higher rank, bringing to 29 the total number of generals in the service.

The Air Force currently has 13 brigadier generals and seven two-star generals. Lt. Gen. Jose Reuy, JAF commanding general, is a three-star general.

PAF spokesperson Lt. Col. Rusty Bellik said the appointments of seven Air Force generals paved the way for the promotion of officers.

He added that seven more brigadier generals are set to receive this year.

Brig. Gen. Chinito B. Cinco, Air Force vice commander, and Brigadier Generals Rolando I. Ibarreo and Segundo F. Dimaplis are now major generals with their promotions to the two-star rank.

Five Air Force colonels were elevated to the star rank and are now brigadier generals, namely: Francisco Gallenero, Aurelio Marquez, Oscar B. Carmen, Jaime Dizal and Wenando Manalo.

Their appointments were approved by President Macapagal-Arroyo on Jan. 9, said a statement from the PAF yesterday. They have yet to take their formal oath-taking before Mr. Arroyo in Malacañang.

Dizal, a member of the Philippine Military Academy Class '75 and the Philippine Air Force Flying School (PAFFS) Class '75, was the former head of the Air Defense Command prior to his appointment as Air Force vice commander.

Ibarreo, described by the JAF as a "topnotch distinguished and intelligence officer," was a member of PMA Class '74 and PAFFS Class '75. He was also a senior military assistant to then Defense Secretary Angelo Reyes. He is currently the JAF chief of air staff.

Dimaplis, a member of PAFFS Class '75, is the incumbent commander of the PAF Air Education and Training Command based in the Fernando Air Base in Lipa, Batangas.

As "jet-rate [psychological warfare specialist] specialist," Dimaplis was previously with the Civil Military Office.

Repentant tree cutter, 7 other witnesses vs loggers

From page A1

dents...all by real-life forestry poverty to cut trees for easy cash—to pity about the entire judiciary who, they said, had paid or promised them a measly income for tree-planting in the Bicol Watch.

According to the sworn statements, villagers are offered between P500 and P700 "per board foot" of logs delivered to sawmills. The money is named through "financiers" serving as a sort of middlemen for the logging operators.

The witness believes that he has finally snagged the big fish in illegal logging in Quezon and Aurora.

He said that the DENR would file today with the Department of Justice (DoJ) a logging case against Governor Clavel Pinpin Martinez and Rosauro Ino, Jane Pacific Forest Resources Corp. (JPRC) and Nardito Sawmill.

Closet GMA chief of staff

In Defensor's account, Governor Clavel wrote 75,000 hectares of property for logging and sawmill operations, while the JPRC, believed to be a subsidiary of Green Circle, has 10,000 ha.

He said these firms were engaged in illegal logging because they were operating outside their concession areas.

But Defensor cleared Norberto Gonzales, President Macapagal-Arroyo's chief of staff whom his accusers have blamed for a long ago had linked to an alleged illegal logger, of involvement in the crime.

Protege

In a privilege speech on Monday, Santiago said Rolly Ino—said to be operating in Bataan, Compostela Valley, Davao Oriental and Davao del Sur—was a protege of a special concerns adviser of the former administration.

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Those to be charged

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Roxas has of late defended his firm in media interviews, arguing that Green Circle was not into logging but was just clearing its 28,000-ha private estate invading Aurora and Quezon for alternative livelihood on industrial and commercial lots—a project endorsed by the government.

But according to Defensor, the DENR has witnesses saying that Roxas and Green Circle property on taken to the company's sawmills to make it appear that the logs are covered by tree-cutting permits issued to timberlands.

Also to be charged are Ben Chong, one "Engineer Bagol" and Jessie Pun—all connected with the JPRC. Chong is the owner of the 8WL "Unged" log concession, and Pun the owner of a trucking firm servicing the company.

Defensor said charges would also be filed against Tessy Ong of the Nardito Sawmill, which is normally a licensed sawmill in Irosin, but which allegedly had been a buyer or "financier" of illegally cut logs from the neighboring town of General Salazar.

Ong is joined by his brothers Wilbert and Nilson Marquez of Irosin, who, Defensor said, were "consistently and regularly identified as financiers of illegal logging."

The other alleged financiers are Carl "Carlo" Bonifacio Arellanodo (brother of General Nestor Mejez Hernando Arellanodo), David Pua Acosta and Thelma Bonamante.

Town leaders

The charges will also cover "town leaders"—or those connected by Bonamante to certain town centers.

They were identified as Mayor Ramon Prudente, Alfredo Gobio, Silvestre Mitra, Cornelio Asunol, Bernardo Servilla, Elpidano Orozco, Lina Orozco, Cledito Briones, and Nestor delos Reyes.

Administrative cases will also be filed against several barangay captains in General Salazar who "did not cooperate" with the DENR in its investigation of illegal logging operations.

Fear of reprisal

In a statement read at the press conference, Defensor listed the sawmill companies and persons "responsible for the death and destruction" to dozens and Quezon, the protesters that bore the brunt of the storms that whipped eastern Luzon last November.

He said his legal team took some time considering witnesses to testify against Green Circle et al.

"The enormities of the criminality that were committed, the fear of reprisal as those [respondents] are unmoved individuals, with guns and resources. But also because [the witnesses] perceive Malacañang as their source of livelihood," Defensor said.

He said financiers "give families food on the table" and are in turn regarded by villagers with "using as both shelter of protection."

Under protection

Defensor said his eight witnesses were now "under the protection" of the Office of the Regional Executive Director, which took their sworn statements in the presence of lawyer Jimmy Addeo, a former agent of the National Bureau of Investigation and now the BIT's for Target INA.

Rafael, 53, a resident of Bingalan, Aurora, said his friend were perished when the former flood overflowed last Nov. 29 at the peak of storm "Winnie."

It was the entire town that they all believed to be a part of his affidavit that explained how he collected logs.

"Once we have gathered a hefty volume of logs, a master hauler drags them to a sawmill of Green Circle, which buys them for P4 to P10 per board foot."

How they operate

Another witness, Miguel Ramento, 37, provided a glimpse into how Ben Chong and Green Circle had been allegedly getting their logs.

Chong offers P3 per board foot, "or more," to small operators who want to make some money and cut some trees and bring the wood to Green Circle."

Logs "cut in other areas" are brought to sawmills inside Green Circle "to be turned into 'white,' so as to make them legal," Ramento added.

Governors angry, gang up on Miriam

From page A1

Santos said Santiago should stop backing up the wrong tree. "The economies in South Cotabato had long been denuded when I [became] governor," she said.

Santos said the president of Negros could not be blamed for the shortcomings and mistakes of previous local officials, especially during the 1986 and 1992s when commercial logging was rampant.

"Let us not politicize the problem, and in fact we are the ones now finding solutions to it," she said.

Pastrana said she called Environment Secretary Michael Defensor, Santiago's nephew, after the senator made her speech, "only to be told that what the DENR had provided the latter was a list of the provinces where logs had been seized.

"It was a useless report, for the problem cannot only be the interception and delivery of the speech," she said.

North Cotabato Gov. Manny Pinol said it was preposterous that his name was included in the list of governors in need of logs or lumber who not allowed to be provinces.

Sarangani Gov. Miguel Rene Dominguez denied that he was doing nothing to stop illegal logging in his province.

He said that right after he assumed office last year, he declared an all-out war against illegal logging. As a result, he said, more than 10,000 board feet of illegally cut logs were confiscated from January to the provincial environment officials and the police.

Dominguez also claimed that as early as last August, he had proposed to the DENR a total log ban and a cancellation of all timber permits in the province.

Governor believes that he has finally snagged the big fish in illegal logging in Quezon and Aurora.

He said that the DENR would file today with the Department of Justice (DoJ) a logging case against Governor Clavel Pinpin Martinez and Rosauro Ino, Jane Pacific Forest Resources Corp. (JPRC) and Nardito Sawmill.

Closet GMA chief of staff

In Defensor's account, Governor Clavel wrote 75,000 hectares of property for logging and sawmill operations, while the JPRC, believed to be a subsidiary of Green Circle, has 10,000 ha.

He said these firms were engaged in illegal logging because they were operating outside their concession areas.

But Defensor cleared Norberto Gonzales, President Macapagal-Arroyo's chief of staff whom his accusers have blamed for a long ago had linked to an alleged illegal logger, of involvement in the crime.

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Police colonel rattles skeletons in media closets

From page A1

cases in the name of media ethics," Ventosa told Inquirer.

Ventosa said he found himself a target of fierce criticisms for remarks he supposedly made last December about his wanting to kill media practitioners.

"Wow, I see media people. If I survive this I suddenly have the urge to kill," Ventosa had purportedly said, according to NUJP Executive Secretary Carolina Hilao, a member of an international fact-finding mission which recently investigated the unsolved killings of journalists in the Philippines.

Hilao said Ventosa later clarified that he made the remark in jest.

Alleged links to gamblers

Ventosa has denied making such an utterance but the report has prompted Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez and opposition Sen. Panfilo Lacson to demand he be investigated.

Ventosa, in his talk with the inquirer, said the radio reporter to whom he supposedly made the threat was on the "payroll" of illegal gambling operations, receiving P500 weekly.

He said the accusations against him were instigated by a group of "corrupt" radio reporters hit by his campaign against rampant illegal gambling in Camarines Norte.

Ventosa said he found out about this after he was escorted home by Criminal Investigation and Detection Group in Camp Crame to his new post.

Power of media

In Camarines Norte, provincial directors get sacked once the local media provides for their relief, he said.

Ventosa said the case of Chief Supt. Rowland Albano who, he said, was relieved in 2003 for publicly lambasting a no-nonsense campaign against illegal gambling, like "jueteng" and video karera, where people place bets in a horse race available in video machines.

Ventosa said that video karera operations were very rampant here," he said. "Some investigators, reporters and policemen would raid dens only to operate the seized machines themselves."

Ventosa said this went on until last October when he started burning all seized video karera machines.

Some operators turned to reporters who were boasting they would "fix" the matter with the local police, he said.

Reporters in 'Blue Book'

The reporters allegedly became aggressive and demanded protection or "grease" money in exchange for the "fixes."

Ventosa said this forced a group of Internet video karera operators to file extortion and robbery charges against the reporters.

"They thought I was the one behind the filing of the charges, that's why they decided to attack me," he said.

Ventosa said he further outraged reporters when he found a "Blue Book" purportedly containing the names of all gambling operations and at least 15 reporters from three local radio stations in the province.

"The local media ganged up on me, thinking I would link all of them to the illegal operations," he said. "Then they turned to the NUJP and made up the accusation that I threatened to kill them."

NUJP's Hilao, in an earlier talk with reporters, said that poor working conditions in the industry made journalists more vulnerable to attacks.

"The vast majority of journalists are receiving a pittance or nothing at all for their work. They are being exploited and sometimes forced into conflict-of-interest situations," she said.

No 'culture of violence'

Interior Secretary Angelo Reyes denied assertions by the senators organized by the Bantay Katotohanan sa Media Foundation Inc. (Bantay) that a "culture of violence" often condoned by government officials was to blame for the killings of journalists in the country.

Reyes said instead, the existence of death squads allegedly used by some local officials to clamp out enemy elements in their areas, as claimed by the Bantay group.

"The national government will never tolerate the existence of death squads, vigilante or other such entities illegally formed groups to execute or otherwise physically attack citizens suspected of criminal activities or for any other reason," said Reyes.

No evidence

"While it is true that some media personalities and organizations have reported about the activities of alleged death squads or vigilante groups in some places, there is no evidence showing that such activities have been sanctioned by the mayor or other local authorities," he added.

The P3.9-M P. mission said more than 50 Filipino journalists had been killed since democracy was restored in 1986, with 13 murdered last year, making the Philippines the second deadliest place for media people, after Iraq.

Using a PNP report, Reyes said that of the 50 journalists killed from 1986 to 2004, 31 cases had been filed in court against suspects and 20 were under investigation. The rest has secured but convictions and four other murder cases were dismissed.

Culture of apathy

Of the cases still under investigation, six of the victims were killed in the areas the between government and insurgency forces, while two were killed during the coup attempts in 1986 and 1989.

Gordon's support

The mission's report was support from administration Sen. Richard Gordon.

"Why does it have to take an international [mission] to tell us that we have such a problem?" he asked.

In the same phone interview, Gordon also called on journalists to watch their backs and not engage in corruption.

"Those who engage [in corruption] usually become targets if the persons they get protection money from are found out. Some get their payments. Obviously, rightly or wrongly, a killing is a killing," he said. With a report [p] and those from dispatches

RP-US defense board starts war games plans

By Alcuin Papa

THE JOINT RP-US Mutual Defense Board held its first meeting of the year in Camp Aguinaldo yesterday to plan the activities to be conducted by the Filipino and American militaries in 2005, activities that would include joint military exercises.

Capt. Dennis Williams, liaison officer of the US Pacific Command, told reporters the standing committee of the MDB met to "plan and develop programs" for the two militaries this year.

"What we have here is the kick-off of this year's standing committee meetings. It is part of a regular process to use military to military relationship to plan and develop programs that will be effective for our militaries in the future," Williams said.

He said "security issues" would be discussed at the three-day meet, which could include the Abu Sayyaf and the Jemaah Islamiyah, two groups affiliated with Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terror network.

Williams also confirmed the US military was starting to redeploy its humanitarian forces in the South Asian countries hit by the recent tsunami disaster, but was unclear if these forces would be transferred to the Philippines.

"Depending on what the length of [its] stay is for military assistance in the [tsunami-hit countries], that is starting to be reduced as more militaries have other commitments and as governments agencies and NGOs are having the capability to provide various types of support," he said.

"The US military, in a very structured manner, is starting to shift some of its resources elsewhere, as far as the discussion of the number of [US troops in our very strong exercise programs with the Philippines, which number approximately 26 a year in connection], most there are a number of factors that go into developing how many troops will participate," Williams said.

He said the MDB was "always evaluating what is the best mix of troops, OR and AFP with what are the particular needs of the government of the Philippines, including exercises so that ultimately we will help the AFP develop and enhance to respond to contingencies."

The MDB is composed of some 40 members from the US including the Department of National Defense and the Department of Foreign Affairs. The board is an offshoot of the 1951 Mutual Defense Treaty signed in 1951.

"This security network contributes to regional stability providing a political environment and stability and economic growth all around the region," Williams said.

The MDB conducts meetings three times a year. After the standing and working group committees meet, the executive committee planning sessions are held.

Finally, the senior military leadership board meets and finalizes the MDB's plans.

Indons doubt Bali bomber's death

JAKARTA—Indonesian Foreign Minister Hasan Wirayuda on Tuesday expressed doubt about reports that a key Bali bomber had been killed in a military airstrike in the southern Philippines.

A Philippine military official said over the weekend that Dulmatin and fellow Indonesian Mohammad Ali Abdul Rahman were among those killed when aircraft targeted a meeting in Mindanao on Thursday.

"I still doubt the veracity of the news," Wirayuda said, according to the state Antara news agency.

Indonesian police said Dulmatin helped assemble the bombs that killed 202 people, most by foreigners, in the resort island of Bali in October 2002.

Wirayuda said Philippine officials had in the past been reluctant to provide details whenever allegations of Indonesian citizens' involvement in terrorism in that country surfaced.

"When we ask for information, we rarely get an answer," he said.

Philippine local military commander Col. Dewy Jalandoni said Saturday that intelligence reports indicated the airstrike killed one of three Indonesian members of the Jemaah Islamiyah regional terrorist group in the area.

He said seven ripped-up bodies had been found after the strike.

The military attacked after receiving information that the three members of Jemaah Islamiyah were meeting leaders of the Abu Sayyaf Muslim kidnap group.

Antarik Khalilullah is said to be linked to al-Qaida and is blamed for the Bali bombings and a series of other attacks in Indonesia, AFP

4 PNP men killed on way to seek bandits' surrender

By Edwin O. Fernandez
INQ Mindanao Bureau

COTABATO CITY—Nine police commandos died en route to negotiate the surrender of Pentagon kidnap-gang members when killed police say when they were ambushed by unidentified gunmen in Shigalcabalan.

The 11 members escaped with the latter's rifles of the four officers and the military has launched a pursuit operation, said Col. Franklin del Prado, spokesperson of 6th Infantry Division.

The police team, led by Chief Insp. Aurelio Cabang, were waylaid at 6 p.m. in Barangay Manda in Datu Piang.

Besides Cabang, the other policemen killed were identified as Supt. Ernesto Mosquera, SPO3 Mansour and PO3 Abello.

The Associated Press quoted the police as saying that the officers were on their way to seek the surrender of Pentagon members when they were fired upon.

The Pentagon gang is one of three guerrilla groups in the country which the United States has put on its terror blacklist. The others are the communist New People's Army and the also feared bandit gang.

The military could not say who were behind the attack. But del Prado said the ambush occurred in an area where the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the Philippine gang and other lawless groups operated.

MILF spokesperson Eid Kabalu said his group had a sizeable force in the area but that "definitely the MILF has [nothing] to do with this."

Kabalu said the report he received was that the policemen were ambling the outbreaks of some MILF fighters.

The MILF has signed a cease-fire agreement with the government and off-and-on peace talks between the two sides were expected to resume in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia this month. *With AP*

PHILIPPINE National Police chief, Director General Edgar B. Aglipay, poses with the 22 newly promoted senior superintendents during simple ceremonies at the PNP Multi-purpose Center in Camp Crame recently. Aglipay administered their oath of office.

PNP goes 'hi-tech' with ATM payroll

By Christine V. Esguerra

WHAT took them so long?

After years of lagging behind most other entities in the way it pays its people, the Philippine National Police will finally be going "state-of-the-art" with the use of automated teller machines (ATMs).

In two weeks, the PNP will sign a memorandum of agreement with the Land Bank of the Philippines to setup the old "commission form checks," according to Chief Supt. Nestor de la Torre, PNP comptroller.

De la Torre said the PNP local offices ordered the switch to the ATM system as part of several measures to stamp out corruption in the police force.

"We really need to fix the system through which we pay our people, closing all possible room for corruption," he told the Inquirer yesterday.

The new system is anything but novel, though, having been engaged many years now in the past by not a few PNP officials.

The problem, police general had once told the Inquirer, was that the old system allowed unscrupulous officers to pad salary rolls with "ghost" or "15-30" employees—those who did not exist but only showed up on the 15th and 30th of each month to collect their salaries.

Later last year, a major operational support unit was investigated after one of its officials allegedly managed to collect and pocket his unit's allowances.

The official allegedly did so by getting a list of the men under him in the unit's finance officials. He pocketed their salaries after forging their signatures on the list, the general said.

"Under the new system, there would no longer be any room for ghost or 15-30 employees," he said.

Another anti-corruption measure will be the creation of an "external audit service," a new department that would canvas all PNP stations, according to de la Torre.

There will also be the "e-Procurement" system that will place all bidding online. The idea is to minimize the "human factor," a common source of corruption in transactions.

The new auditing unit will report directly to the PNP chief and will be headed by a "very senior" PNP official of impeccable credentials, de la Torre said.

Also, he said, the PNP hopes to wipe out "contractors," "fixers-bank" and other ingenious corruption schemes, he said.

Government bigwigs who still own spend money specifically allocated for any costs in excess. It's worse when an legitimate item is bought.

Throughout is what crooked officers allocate a hefty sum for an imaginary project only to pocket the money.

House starts warming up for Cha-cha

AFTER delivering on Malacañang's wish list of tax measures, the House of Representatives is preparing to cha-cha.

The House committee on constitutional amendments yesterday approved a proposed for a concurrent resolution that would call on the House and Senate to constitute themselves into a constituent assembly to introduce changes to the 1987 Constitution.

Committee chair Rep. Constantino Jaime Calixto, Cagayan de Oro City's said the amendments would focus mainly on the shift to a parliamentary system and federal form of government.

"Unanimous changes are to be taken as part of the solution to our economic problems," Jaime said in an interview.

The proposed resolution also provides for the constituent assembly to undertake a "review of basic economic provisions" aimed at "maximizing the benefits and welfare of the people without be-

ing disabled by narrow-minded and nationalistic constraints and limitations."

Jaime said the committee would push for their deliberations on the Charter change bill to start in March.

"Since the Senate is still deliberating on the measures already passed by the House as well as the pending 2005 budget bill, we will wait until March," Jaime said.

The resolution must also be approved by the Senate, however.

According to Jaime, the constituent assembly would be expected to finish within a year the deliberations on the draft to a constitutional convention and the review of economic provisions.

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Killed-in-action social worker honored

By Yuh Contreras

WITH a 22-year experience in social work in Cagayan, Primitivo Cabrera had become the kind of person who would "give up the last P20 in her pocket if you desperately needed it," according to his brother Ulnie.

"She was not good in relating people," added her sister Daisy. "that's why officemates would often turn to her concerning clients who had no money even for a ride home."

And so nobody was really surprised when "Primie," last Oct. 19, willingly went with a man who showed up days earlier at her Tuguegarao City office asking for help. The stranger introduced himself as a rebel and claimed he had two wounded comrades who must be taken to a hospital and were willing to surrender to the government.

Nine days later, on the 28th, Cabrera was found dead by a creek outside the city. The 44-year-old social worker apparently died from several blows on the head. Her body was found after police stormed the man who had sought her help, the distressed "rebel" turned out to be part of a kidnap-for-ransom gang.

Primie's story was retold yesterday in the Department of Social Welfare and Development, where her still grieving family received her posthumous award: in memory of her exemplary service.

'Killed in action'

The DSWD marked its 54th founding anniversary by bestowing a plaque of recognition to Cabrera who, in the department's eulogy, was "killed in action."

Her teary-eyed parents, Damaso and Nidita, received the plaque and a cash gift from Social Welfare Secretary Corazon "Dinky" Soliman, following a dedication tribute to their late daughter.

Born to farmer parents, Primie was the eldest in a brood of five. Her breadwinner who supported her siblings' studies as well as that of their nieces

CABRERA

With the brains that can lead her to more lucrative professions, the ranking honor student in elementary and high school had her eyes set on becoming a social worker.

She worked with the DSWD from 1981 to 1994, often assigned to its relief offices in Cagayan. At the time of her death, she was working under the Cagayan provincial government's social welfare and development office.

She's been a veteran of countless relief operations, according to siblings Daisy and Dixie. Primie was often among the first and the bravest to battle to ride on rubber boats during floods, "even through the current strike," Dixie recalled.

"She really enjoyed her job," Daisy said. "And we all thought that she can never be in danger in her line of work."

But that unsettling thought came to a life-shattering end.

Kidnapped for ransom

Police investigation revealed that Cabrera, after being approached by the rebel impostor on Oct. 10, agreed to meet with him on the 19th at the Victory Liner bus terminal in the city. In that rendezvous, the man abducted by the man and his cohorts, and took her on a banca to Barangay Fabrica in Lallo town.

Two days later, Cagayan Gov. Edgar Lara requested receiving a call from a man who demanded that he pay P2 million for Cabrera's release. The social worker's family, who managed to get a line on the kidnappers, were able to negotiate and had the ransom lowered to P150,000.

The suspects ordered Ulnie to put the money in a box and send it through a Iligan-Manila bus bound for Dagupan City on Oct. 27.

It was on the supposed payoff day that police intercepted Franklin de la Cruz, the man who went to see and delivered Cabrera as the initial verification. The suspect was arrested as he was about to board the evasion money at the bus terminal. De la Cruz had also squealed on at least six other cohorts, who remained at large.

SUPREME COURT DOCTRINES

REMEDIAL LAW; CIVIL PROCEDURE;—Petition for review under Rule 45;—This case must be dismissed outright as the petitioner adopted the wrong mode in bringing this case before this court. Petitioner should have filed a petition for review under Rule 45 of the 1997 Rules of Civil Procedure instead of a special civil action for certiorari under Rule 65. The proper remedy of a party aggrieved by a decision of the Court of Appeals is a petition for review under Rule 45, which is not identical to a petition for certiorari under Rule 65. Under Rule 45, decisions, final orders or resolutions of the Court of Appeals in any case, i.e., regardless of the nature of the action or proceedings involved, may be appealed to us by filing a petition for review which would be but a continuation of the appellate process over the original case. On the other hand, a special civil action under Rule 65 is an independent action based on the specific grounds therein provided for, as a general rule, cannot be availed of as a substitute for the lost remedy of an ordinary appeal, including that by the writ under Rule 65, accordingly, when a party adopts an improper remedy, as in the case, his petition may be dismissed outright. [Gumabon vs. Director of Bureau of Lands, 37 SCRA 420 (1971); Buan vs. Court of Appeals, G. R. No. 150395, November 6, 2003]

BY B. B. VIDA

THE DAILY GOSPEL

Wednesday, February 2, 2005
Presentation of the Lord

1st Reading:	Mal 3:1-4
2nd Reading:	Heb 2:14-18
Gospel:	Luke 2:22-32

When the day came for the purification according to the law of Moses, they took Joseph brought the baby up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord: Every firstborn male shall be consecrated to God. And they offered a sacrifice as ordered by the law of the Lord: a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons.

Now there lived in Jerusalem at that time a very upright and devout man named Simeon. The Holy Spirit was in him. He looked forward to the consolation of Israel and the Holy Spirit had revealed something to him: he would not die before seeing the Messiah of the Lord. So he was led into the Temple by the Holy Spirit at the time the parents brought the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law.

Simeon took the child in his arms and blessed God, saying, "Now, O Lord, you can dismiss your servant in peace, for you have fulfilled your word. And my eyes have seen your salvation, which you display for all the people to see. Here is the light you will reveal to the nations and the glory of your people Israel."

Commentary

Traditionally this is the last day of the Epiphany season when Jesus, the first born of Joseph and Mary is finally given in obedience to the service of Yahweh, the God of the people Israel by thanksgiving for their release from bondage in Egypt. It is a feast of light, when the Light of God begins to move into the world of ordinary time and history, growing surely and resolutely in the power of the Spirit of God to the person of Jesus. The homily is met by Simeon the old faithful prophet about to meeting on the arms of God and his own true hope and hope that is present. This is "the light [God is] revealing to the nations" and God has in him set it to his lifetime, gratuitously. Hers will be ours, too, and those closed to the Light will know their own hearts torn open, exposed and surrendered because of closeness to the burning fire of God. The ritual finished, the child grows to wisdom, God's grace upon him. This is our way of salvation; we have entered the light in the Word made flesh. Now we are to grow to wisdom through obedience and living that light into the world to our flesh and time.

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The WORLD

Editor Lawrence B. Rosca

Al-Qaida vows to pursue jihad in Iraq

BAGHDAD—Al-Qaida vowed to pursue "holy war" in Iraq on Monday after failing to wreck elections, and Prime Minister Iyad Allawi urged rival ethnic and religious groups to unite after the first multiparty vote in 50 years.

Al-Qaida Islamist militants announced the Iraqi elections on Sunday as an "American game" but leaders around the world hailed the vote as an unexpected success, regardless of whether they had supported or opposed the U.S.-led war in 2003.

Pro-opposition France, Germany and Russia all hailed Iraqis' bravery in voting and, in a sign of warming transatlantic ties, pledged to back U.S.-allied transitional authority.

But the al-Qaida group in Iraq, whose leader Abu Musab al-Zarqawi had threatened voters with death in a bid to wreck the election, said it would pursue its war against US-led occupying forces and Iraqis working with them.

"We in the al-Qaeda Organization for Holy War in Iraq will continue to the jihad (war) in the banners of Islam flutters over Iraq," said the statement posted on an Islamist website.

A videotape on Monday purported to show insurgents from another militant group, Ansar al-Sunnah Army, close with invading Iraqi and U.S. military posts with armored vehicles and machine guns.

The video, aired by an Arabic TV channel and issued by the 1920 Revolution Brigades, showed seven gunmen there abandoning debris of what looked like a post, including an engine on the ground and Humvee at close range in a large field.

Analysts said the wreckage on the video looked authentic but the four men—dressed in a hunter-looking jumpsuit and a combat-wearing off shipsuit—seen less convincing.

In a televised speech, Allawi warned Iraqis resistance had not ended just because the election had exceeded expectations and he urged the militants to begin unity.

"The attacks would is murdering us. As we worked together worst day to finish dictatorship, let us work together toward a bright future—Iraqis and Shiites, Muslims and Christians, Arabs, Kurds and for Iraqis."

Allawi, who could be supposed of, a known to build popular support after a poll in which decisive official estimate 8 million Iraqis voted, outstanding problems' many would be united away by insurgent threats of a bloodbath.

He added that elections day onslaught of suicide bombers and mortars was less bloody than expected, violence persisted.

On Monday, three US Marines were killed in action south of Baghdad, the US military said, and US guards shot dead four Iraqi nationals during a row at a military prison in southern Iraq. Reuters

Success of Iraq elections seen affecting Arab nations

BEIRUT—The winds of democracy are blowing from Iraq, and Arab nations are trying to ride the breeze.

The success of a democratic election in Iraq, however imperfect, after decades of dismissing could put pressure on Arab leaders to address their political opposition, said Gen Hassan, and the army with authoritarian governments.

"The Americans were able to hold elections in Iraq and that made them much more comfortable in carrying on with their policies in the Middle East," said Lebanese political analyst Ali Ramadan. "They showed every body that you can carry on with an elections process and you army, you have security problems."

Ramadan said the advantage of the election is that if Iraq could carry out "in all weather democratic process" there is no excuse for other countries not to reform.

Many are hoping the process—at least it marks a show of democratic reforms—and 2005 is shaping up to be the year of Middle East elections, even if few of them are expected to threaten the established regimes.

The Palestinians held a poll—widely praised, despite a few irregularities—which brought Mahmoud Abbas to power earlier this month to replace Yasser Arafat, who died in November.

Saudi Arabia, an absolute monarchy, will hold its first municipal elections in 40 years beginning Feb. 10, a vote postponed from last September.

A parliamentary election in Lebanon, expected by May will test Syria's grip on the country as the West pushes Damascus to withdraw its army. Three presidential elections were influenced deeply by Syria, which will have pressure to back off on this one.

Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, holds presidential and parliamentary elections later this year, though the president-dominated vote is essentially a referendum on one candidate approved by a parliament dominated by President Hosni Mubarak's party. Mubarak, 76, and in power since 1981, is seeking a fifth six-year term despite calls for him to retire.

Jordan's King Abdullah II announced plans last week to introduce limited democratic reforms by establishing elected councils to oversee development in a CNN interview aired Monday, he said the Iraqi elections are a positive base for his region.

"Once you open the door of reform and it's allowed to be discussed openly, not only inside the Middle East, its very difficult to close again, so I think that people are waking up, leaders are understanding that they have to push reforms forward and I don't think there's any looking back," he said.

But others were more hesitant, saying the regional impact of the elections remained to be seen.

"The United States considers that just holding an election is a triumph by itself. This a hollow call," said Hassan Nafaa, a political science professor at Cairo University. "The core of the issue is whether the elections are the beginning of a solution to the Iraq issue or whether they are part of an escalation."

After toppling Saddam Hussein in 2003, the United States promised Iraq would become a model for Arab democracy, and pushed regimes in the region to yield to some local demands for change. Results, Washington says, will make Arabs more receptive than before to the ground be overseas.

That policy was broadly welcomed as Ed Presidents George W. finally entered inaugural speech earlier this month. AP

TYRE Jan. 25 (AP) Department of Defense handout image released Jan. 25 shows a Marine scanning an Iraqi citizen's retina at Ibrahim Park in Fallujia, Iraq. US Marines are enlisting a Biometric Analysis Training System to find and identify insurgent forces. AFP

EU halts sanctions on Cuba

BRUSSELS—The European Union suspended diplomatic sanctions against pro-Cuba Monday, ending a standoff triggered by a crackdown on dissidents by Havana in 2003—but it vowed to maintain pressure on Fidel Castro.

The suspension, to be reviewed before July, was decided after Castro's regime released a number of dissidents and signaled a re-opening of diplomatic contacts with EU embassies in Havana.

"All measures taken on June 5, 2003 have been temporarily suspended," said Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn, whose country currently holds the EU's rotating presidency, in reference to the date the sanctions were agreed.

The decision will notably allow the resumption of high-level visits, although until trips must be agreed by each individual member state to progress on human rights and the rights of dissidents in Cuba.

The EU froze relations with Cuba following a crackdown that saw 75 dissidents jailed for terms of between six and 28 years. Three Cubans found guilty of hijacking a ferry were executed.

But the standoff has eased since the release of a number of dissidents for health reasons and partly as a gesture in win over EU nations most opposed to lifting the sanctions.

In addition Cuba announced on January 31 it was restoring diplomatic ties with all EU states represented in Havana, including the four most opposed to lifting the sanctions: the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, Poland and Slovakia.

But the suspension of the sanctions is not a definitive end to the row.

Asselborn said the suspension will be reviewed under the Luxembourg EU presidency—which runs on June 30—"in the light of developments and progress toward pluralism and respect of human rights in Cuba."

"We highlighted the need to support a process leading to democracy and the respect of human rights and have elections in Cuba," he added in a break from regular EU foreign ministers' talks in Brussels. AFP

ARCHEOLOGICAL FIND
One of the 14 stone carvings that were found in the archeological area of the Templo Mayor in Mexico City's main square. The Templo and other structures were some of the first sights Hernan Cortez and his Spanish invaders saw when they arrived at Tenochtitlan nearly 500 years ago. AFP/ROSA

Military tribunals in Guantanamo unconstitutional, judge declares

WASHINGTON—A US federal judge Monday ruled that military tribunals for terrorism-war suspects at the Guantanamo Bay Naval base are unconstitutional, handing the Bush administration a setback in its drive to detain hundreds of the US-run detention center in Cuba.

The administration of President George W. Bush, which created the tribunals, contested the ruling, saying that an earlier Federal Court ruling had supported US policy to uphold Commander-in-chief.

"We respectfully disagree with the decision," said White House spokesperson Scott McClellan.

After a two-year legal battle, up pends filed by 11 "enemy combatants" held at the facility, "the court concludes that the petitioners have stated valid claims under the Fifth Amendment to the United States Constitution," US Judge Janis Lucy Green wrote in her ruling, adding that the detentions "violate the petitioners' rights to due process of law."

The Fifth Amendment to the US Constitution states that no one under US jurisdiction can be "be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law."

The court also found that some of the detainees, are in fact, covered by the Geneva Conventions.

"The court holds that at least some of the petitioners have stated valid claims under the third Geneva Convention," according to a declassified version of the federal ruling which was posted Monday on the court's website.

Green ruled that US officials set Mehdi Ben detainees access to evidence used against them, and that the US government has refused to rely on statements obtained by torture. She also determined that the government has violated the detainees' "enemy combatant" was vague and overly broad.

Inspects captured in the US-led war on terrorism, most of whom were taken prisoner in Afghanistan after US-led forces toppled the Taliban regime, remain held at the military field on Bagram southeastern-of-Soviet Geneva Convention protections.

Detainees at Guantanamo were taken into custody beginning in early 2002, with some imprisoned now for nearly three years, while others were released as recently as September of last year.

"Although many of these individuals may never have been close to an actual battlefield and may never have borne arms against the United States or its allies, the military nonetheless has deemed these detainable as 'enemy combatants' based on undisputed that they have ties to the al-Qaida terror network or other terrorist organizations," the court document said. AFP

Jury selection starts in Jackson molestation case

SANTA MARIA, Calif.—After months of delays and motion practical publicity, Michael Jackson took his seat in court on Monday as the task of selecting a jury began in the child molestation case that has put his career, reputation and freedom at risk.

By the end of the first day, more than 300 people had been asked whether they would be able to spend up to six months on the jury. Finding a panel to hear the case is expected to take up to a month.

More than 175 potential jurors said they could serve, while about 130 said it would be too an undue and asked to be excused.

The 46-year-old self-described "King of Pop," who said on Sunday that he would be "acquitted and vindicated," is accused of molesting a 13-year-old boy who lived at Jackson's fancy ranch-like Neverland ranch in the hills above the normal California town of Santa Maria.

The potential jurors were brought into from the bare Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville's courtroom about 10:30 a.m., starting about an hour after Jackson sat down with his lawyers at the defense table.

The superior was dressed totally in white—a symbol of innocence—with a jewel-encrusted belt and gold-braided star band.

He looked upbeat, smiled and joked with his lawyers, drank fluids with the court clerk and occasionally dabbed at the pink lipstick he was wearing with a tissue. When jurors were being questioned, Jackson sat completely still.

Jackson did not cause to enter the anticipated trial outside.

"How! heard, I am too old to serve. I am 75 years old," one woman said. "You don't look a day over 68," the judge responded.

Other jurors asked to be excused for reasons ranging from financial hardship to the fact that they were their families' sole breadwinners. Legal experts said the prospective jurors appeared to be predominantly female, with far smaller numbers of blacks and Hispanics.

Judge Melville made notes and reserved decision about who will have to return on Feb. 7 to form the jury pool. The names of the jurors-to-be remain public.

About 200 fans, kept behind two rows of fences, cheered Jackson as he arrived at the courthouse, surrounded by bodyguards, including one who held a large black umbrella over him to shield him from the rain.

Some of Jackson's supporters camped out overnight in the courthouse, despite chilly weather and fences designed to keep them well away from the proceedings.

The lone sang songs and held up signs of encouragement, including such placards as "Prince Supports MJ" and "We believe you Michael." Jackson smiled and made a V-for-victory sign.

JACKSON is surrounded by sheriff's deputies as he enters the Santa Barbara County courthouse for jury selection in his child molestation trial in Santa Maria, Calif. on Monday. Defense co-counsel Susan Yu appears the magistrate over at left.

He is accused of sexually molesting the boy while the youth and his family lived at Neverland, charges that Jackson has strongly denied.

Jackson's family offered him support. His mother, Katherine, told CBS's "The Early Show" on Monday that, "I know my son and that is to be obvious."

The case of Jackson, one of the world's best-known entertainers, has drawn worldwide media attention.

More than 3,000 accusers from Australia, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, Mexico and the United States have registered to cover the trial.

Although Jackson's former Neverland companion to the hills above Santa Maria, the self-proclaimed "King of Pop" is surely seen in the worldwide close journal 89,000.

A grand jury handed down a 10-count indictment against Jackson in April, charging him with lewd acts on a child under the age of 14 and conspiring to commit the crimes of abduction, false imprisonment and extortion.

The indictment stems from accusations made by a now 15-year-old boy and entertaining county police soon-looking bench with, which was in a controversial documentary that aired on ABC and British television in February 2003.

Jackson on Sunday released a videotaped statement saying that he looked to the media about grand jury testimony in the case examined information that was "disgusting and false" and predicted victory in trial. Reuters

BASQUE HOLIDAY
A man from the small Spanish Basque village of Ezkaroz, Spain, on Monday walks in disguise as he leaves a barn to frighten the village spirits and to have a good spring harvest, at the start of the holiday of Carnestoltas

Nepal king sacks government

KATMANDU—King Gyanendra dismissed Nepal's government on Tuesday and declared a state of emergency, taking control of the Himalayan kingdom for the second time in three years.

He blamed his takeover over a coup, although soldiers surrounded the homes of Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba and other government leaders.

The king announced his decision to sack the government on state radio, less than an hour after communications links between Katmandu and the rest of the world appeared to break.

India's NDTV television channel said the monarch had placed politicians under house arrest, but no further details were available.

Armoured military vehicles with mounted machine guns were patrolling the streets of Katmandu, the capital, and phone lines in the city had been cut.

The strategic Himalayan nation, sandwiched between India and China, is locked in a three-cornered struggle among the king, political parties and Maoist rebels.

In an announcement on state television, the king accused the government of failing to conduct parliamentary elections and bring stable democracy to the country, which is beset by rebel violence.

"I have Cabinet will be formed under my leadership," he said, accusing political parties of plunging the country into crisis. "This will restore peace and effective democracy in the country within the next three years."

Later, state-run television reported that a state of emergency had been declared.

The monarch, who is also the supreme commander of the 75,000-member Royal Nepalese Army, said security forces needed to given more power to maintain law and order, but he insisted human rights would be respected.

Deuba also was fired as prime minister in October 2002, sparking mass street protests demanding the restoration of a democratically-elected government.

The king subsequently ruled Deuba last year with the task of holding parliamentary elections by March 2005 and conducting peace talks with the Maoist rebels.

This is the fourth time the king has sacked a prime minister in less than three years. Nepal has had no parliament since 2002.

Nepal has been in turmoil since Gyanendra, 55, suddenly ascended the throne in 2001 after his brother, King Birendra, was gunned down at a palace reception apparently assassinated by Birendra's son, the crown prince, who also died. Ten members of the royal family were killed.

Riots shook Katmandu after the killings, with police opening fire on demonstrators.

Since then, fighting has raged between government forces and the rebels, who control large parts of Nepal's countryside.

The rebels, who draw inspiration from the late Chinese revolutionary leader Mao Zedong, have been trying since 1996 to overthrow the government and establish a communist state. They have refused the government's invitations to come into the mainstream of Nepalese politics and end the violence.

More than 10,000 people have died since the fighting began.

Democracy and royalty have long had a difficult relationship in Nepal.

Gyanendra's late father, King Mahendra, established a rubber-stamp government and parliament but retained absolute power and outlawed political parties. The absolute monarchy ended after street demonstrations forced the king to give way to a multiparty government in 1990. AP/Reuters

Pope stricken with flu, cancels audiences

VATICAN CITY—Pope John Paul is suffering from influenza and has been forced to cancel public appearances for the first three days of the week, including his general audience on Wednesday, a Vatican source said.

The frail, 84-year-old Pope fell ill on Sunday and originally only cancelled his audiences on Monday. Doctors later urged him to take a longer break.

"They have advised him to cancel his engagements to conserve his strength," a Vatican cleric said.

The last time Pope John Paul had to skip a scheduled event was in September 2003, when his weekly audience was scrapped because he was suffering from an intestinal ailment.

However, Vatican officials were at pains on Monday to play down the latest illness.

"He has joined the other millions of Italians who have the flu," chief Vatican spokesperson Joaquin Navarro-Valls said, adding that the Pope had "a slight fever that is no cause for worry."

The Pope, who suffers from Parkinson's disease and no longer walks in public, was well enough to be given the first copy of the 2005 edition of the Vatican yearbook in his private apartments, Navarro-Valls said.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Rome is suffering an unusually cold snap and the elderly pontiff has contended with an outbreak of influenza around Italy that has laid up over one of 1,000 people, state television said.

During his last public appearance, on Sunday in St. Peter's Square, the Pope spoke in a hoarse voice.

The health of the leader of the world's over billion Roman Catholics had been relatively steady in past months.

There have been reports that the improvement was due to changes in his medications by the Parkinson's disease that has afflicted him for more than a decade.

Aides say the Pope is still running the Church despite his ailments, though in recent months they have reduced his workload by keeping audiences short and sending longer speeches for him.

As his health has declined in recent years, the once athletic Pope has created considerable doubt he will stay in office until he dies, in keeping with Papal tradition.

The last Pope to resign willingly was Celestine V, who resigned down in 1294. Reuters

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Fear

EDITORIAL

THE DAY after the International Federation of Journalists' (IFJ) issued a report calling 2009 "a bad year, perhaps the worst ever, for the killing of journalists and media staff," particularly in Iraq and the Philippines, Marites Quindao, editor and publisher of the Tagum-based Mindanao Tradewest, was shot dead. This is one after Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said, "The IFJ report is misleading because majority of cases involving the slaying of journalists have been solved by the PNP's (Philippine National Police's) special task force created for this purpose."

But what was really misleading, what the IFJ said or how the Palace responded? The IFJ pointed out that the murder of 13 journalists in 2009 "tarnished the country's democratic credentials." The report added: "Time and time again, journalists who were vigorous and independent in their reporting are singled out and murdered with apparent impunity." The National Union of Journalists of the Philippines (NUJP) says the police haven't solved the crimes.

The first, and fundamental, problem is that journalists have been murdered and, as shown by what happened to Quindao, they continue to be murdered. At the end of the day, while the government can claim to solve murders, such claims, even if true, are secondary to the real problem, which is that journalists shouldn't have to fear being murdered in the first place. In his wild and woolly way, Justice Secretary Raul Gonzalez got to the heart of the matter by telling the IFJ that it should realize that not all of the more than 50 or 60 journalists killed in the Philippines since 1986 were murdered due to their work in media. But even that doesn't diminish the reality that too many people are being murdered, and too little is being done to make people feel safe.

Bunye was correct in saying that the solution is not to arm journalists. Chris Cramer, founding president of the International News Safety Institute (INSI), said that even if 2004 and 2005 are turning out to be "hunting season for journalists," their safety isn't going to be assured by arming them. The international media have responded to the killings by setting up the INSI, producing, as one British media group puts it, "a new flowering of cooperation in a notoriously fragmented industry." The INSI opened "regional news safety" offices in Africa and Latin America, with more offices in Asia and the Middle East scheduled to span this year to engage in safety training for media people working in "hot spots" like Iraq and the Philippines. To our knowledge, the program does not include training on the use of firearms.

The IFJ says the problem stems from a "culture of fear" reigning in this country. Gerard Seneron, an Australian member of the IFJ team that issued the report, said they learned about senior government officials, including two city mayors in the south, openly supporting the use of death squads to deal with unruly people in their areas. "When such a culture is allowed to flourish at an official level, it is little wonder that aggrieved local strongmen or political figures turn to hit men to get even with the media," Seneron said.

We must add that such strongmen types don't get even only with the media, they get even with whoever crosses their path: witnesses, citizens, political opponents, etc. Since media practitioners can break up a strongman's or warlord's territory, media people, vaulting on top of the death list, Rowena Carranza-Paraan, a Filipino member of the IFJ fact-finding mission, quoted one senior PNP official, as saying chillingly, "When I see media people, it seems that I suddenly have the urge to kill."

The IFJ report serves to us something millions of Filipinos know for a fact, but which, because it is experienced on a personal level and often, in more remote parts of the country, is not experienced collectively by the public. That experience is fear: fear of speaking out, fear of the consequences of displeasing a powerful military man or public official. It is murder happening with increasing frequency that is the biggest problem, and not just the liquidations of some journalists. The murder of journalists guarantees that bad news is localized, and concrete, despite all the lies, that getting at the truth becomes much more difficult. The consequence is inevitably more murders, with less and less of a chance of being solved.

Questions on Masinloc power plant bidding

AS I SEE IT

Amad H. Cruz

THE PHILCO bidding for government ownership has been made mandatory by law to prevent favoritism and corruption in the awarding of government assets. Rules are formulated to govern such bidding. But still, most biddings are followed by charges of collusion, manipulation and "scrimping malaon." Don't we know how to conduct bidding so that we can lessen such controversies?

The 600-megawatt Masinloc coal-powered plant is another such controversial contract. Mirant is reportedly the National Power Corp.'s (Napocor) and most efficient thermal power plant. The winning bid reportedly by the 30th Green Fields consortium—$940 million, but 60 percent of that will be loaned, payable in 25 years, on the buyer by the seller, PHILCO, the government agency tasked with disposing of Napocor's assets. And what are the considerations that the government will get paid for the operation of the power plant?

Indeed, this bidding has raised more questions:

1. Is it true that 30th is a company that has only a P1 million capitalization? Is it a true Filipino bidder? If yes, what is its equity share?

2. Is it true that independent power producers are private companies that usually have little capital? Why would the supposedly unpublicized Australian partner, Great Pacific, not bid in its own name so as to use its credibility in the bid?

With this procedure, what is there to stop future speculative bidders with only $1 million capital to bid for billion peso Napocor power plants?

Why did PHILCO not require any pre-qualification, which is the prudent thing to do for such a big bidding? After all, it will be getting a 60-percent loan to the buyer.

3. Is it only coincidence that only companies closely tied to the Lopez group, which owns Meralco, were able to bid?

When's owners, it should be remembered, got a 2,000-MW power supply contract for Meralco in 2006. They eventually formed Dunamic, which they sold to Hon Asia Power. With owners having this is a control Meralco contract and is close to review of the Meralco president. Hon Asia Power was partly-owned by Aces Natural, at present a commissioner of the Energy Regulatory Commission (ERC) and reportedly an ouster of Edmund Aboitiz, the immediate head of ION of Aces Pacific Investments, supposedly the lead group of 30th consortium. Jose Alcantara was also a former Napocor president and friend of former PHILCO president and Pope Lucila Encumbers PHILCO president-nominee, Edgardo del Rosario.

The second bidder, Trina Consortium, is a Lopez-owned company that controls the 585-MW First Gas Power plant.

3. Was there manipulation to ensure that only a Lopez-friendly group were the bidders?

4. Is it true that the bidding Masinloc as a merchant plant (i.e., without a power supply contract) scared away many otherwise bona fide bidders. Was this intended to limit competition?

Another major bidder was reportedly not allowed to bid when a Lopez subsidiary backed out of a power supply deal with it on last minute, causing the bidder unprepared to bid within time.

Was Hon Corporation's bid of $388 million a joke made only to ensure that there would be no failed bidding?

5. Finally, the government have given a free ex price but a bid Masinloc with a long term power sales agreement which Meralco refused to enter with Napocor?

And would PSEI and Great Pacific have bid higher if the Napocor power sales contract for handling a power supply contract with Meralco?

6. Is it possible that PHILCO and the Department of Energy rushed the bidding to avert a crude resurgence? Observers are rule on when we rush. Or was the urgency used to justify the hidden rules?

7. While we can be happy for what seems to be a good price for the government, there is no assurance that the public will not be charged a higher generation rate when Masinloc and PSPC improve its current supply contract.

Let us hope that Mirant's name showing a future for the consuming public on a public utility company should. It negotiated a blended PSPC 30th that will be 30th. Quezon Power and plans similar to Masinloc at the time they could buy power from Napocor at only P2per kWh.

The 400-MW Quezon Power, by the way, was bedeviled by the Cheshire Group, the owners of the Subic Power plant. Now it's planning a 1,200-MW liquid gas power project in Bataan, again with a negotiated power supply contract with Meralco.

7. There is a contract but not impossible acquisition that our government should watch out for.

As of now, there are only two qualified bidders with solid bids: 1989 Great Pacific with a bid of $546 million, and First Generation with $280 million. Suppose 30th, as a consortium-dominated company, bids a much higher bid—say $546 million? On the surface, it could forfeit its $60 million bid guaranty. But suppose the game plan was to eliminate unfriendly competitors and then First Generation offers to counteroffer 1989 the 30 million bid guaranty and another $9 million for appeals? Should PHILCO refuse? It seems the answer to First Generation which has become the winning bidder is $280 million? If a 1989 refusal of any $20 million is added to $280 million, that totals only $306 million for a 600-MW power plant when the 1989 power project cost is worth at least $480 million.

What is even worse is if PHILCO accepted a $9-million bid guaranty that cannot be executed because it contained many impossible requirements.

If this scenario plays out, the government could lose $250 million or $75 million.

Whatever thoughts of this column is a world-class non-sense, it is too late to save the government from loss?

Heart and mind

THERE'S THE RUB

Conrado de Quiros

IT'S no without drama, and some of the moments were perfectly riveting. The way the Senate was perfectly riveting. The way the Senate was packed to the rafters, as it hasn't been in the first time since 1995, amid the stephen wrenched by those opposed to them. The picture that appeared on our front page last Monday of an Iraqi woman holding her ID and ballot card as she prepared to vote in her country's first election all. I remember a similar picture I saw after the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan, of a woman lifting her veil for the first time in her life. There are gloss, almost spoiled, dumps.

The gist of the speech of the would have to forgiven for having a skeptical, if not cynical, view of the doctrine in Iraq. "This is democracy," AP quotes an elderly Iraqi woman in a black abaya, who is holding up her thumb stained with purple ink. How else the world could smile and gushes Senate Prime Minister Aquel Alawi himself says, "This is the first time the Iraqis will determine their destiny."

Well, you believe.

The gist is gushing. Free elections are a basis in a nation, particularly where they are taken seriously. And nothing can be more serious than people defying threat to life and limit to be able to vote. We had that, too, almost two decades ago this year, during the "snap elections" of January 1986, people trooping to the polls amid the threat of violence from marcos' henchmen.

But the test is not as patent as the test. If the Iraqi elections really represented democracy, the first thing the Iraqis would be deciding, and besides whom they want their prime minister to be, is whether they want to run their country. The first question they should be answering is whether they want the Americans to remain in their country. That is the one question meeting not just Iraq but the world in the face. And that is the one question the Iraq elections are not asking.

The essence of democracy is freedom. No freedom, no democracy. The concept of freedom is the concept of sovereignty. It is the concept of freedom as a nation. Democracy is the concept of freedom as a people. Democracy is the concept of freedom as a people. Democracy is the concept of freedom as a people

Tell-tale signs of economic turnaround

THE SCARCITY of good economic news in the Philippines is such a blow the report of the National Statistical Coordination Board's that the economy grew 4.1 percents in 2009 gave the administration a reason to claim the economy is on the road to a turnaround.

A week ago, the peso rallied for four days against the US dollar during which 10.13 is a dollar but Thursday, its strongest appreciation since during the last 11 months. The administration interpreted the appreciation as a vote of confidence in its economic management from foreign and local investors.

These signs of economic turnaround are at least tell-tale and they have been matched with mixed results in some business sectors, some of which have continued to slide despite further indications that the growth is sustainable. It's too early to celebrate, to the world of economy from some quarters, including Governor Rafael Buenaventura of the Bangko Sentral, who said the economy was still fragile.

According to the NSCB, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth last year was the fastest since the 4.2 percent growth in 1980 and possibly since the 4.5 percent growth in 1979. In the gross national product (GNP), the administration claimed the 2009 growth was the fastest since the 7.6 percent expansion in 1998 and registered 0.6 percent in 2008 and 4.6 percent in 2003.

The NSCB report said revisions accounted for 47 percents of total GDP, and contributed the most to the GDP growth with 1.37 percentage points. Industrial growth rose 1.3 percents compared to 2.8 percents in 2008 and 5.2 percents in 2007. It contributed 0.31 percents of GDP and contributed 1.27 percentage points to the total GDP growth rate. Agriculture, fishery and forestry posted the smallest growth rate with 0.2 percent, but the services sector, industry with 4.9 percents, up from 3.8 percent in 2008.

From another perspective, the economy expanded by 0.6 percent in the fourth quarter last year, its slowest growth in three years, although the 2009 annual growth rate was the highest in 13 years.

Although growth in agriculture was four times

ANALYSIS

Armando Doronila

slower, the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) said the growth was a "big surprise," in view of the series of typhoons last year and mounting political events, notably the presidential election that affected output across industries.

Thomas Orbeck, country director of the Asian Development Bank, noted that GDP grew for the third successive year since 2001, but pointed out that growth and other positive developments since last year "provides a platform to move from the events fields of frustration to more of opportunity that undoubtedly exits."

The most pointed warning against complacency came from Governor Buenaventura, who said that "we should not mistake our near-term performance for because we still have a long way to go," (he said he was referring to the need to pursue aggressively the government's goals of reducing the 11 thousand dollar and seven pesos per capita).

He "attributed the administration's capacity to grow for the passage of its urgent tax reform agenda, saying that Congress has so far passed only one "quantifiable" revenue bill, the one increasing the cigarettes tax rate and the sin taxes on drinks, which is estimated to raise P35 billion in additional revenue a year.

Buenaventura said the 4.1 percent GDP growth rate should have been higher compared with the lower growth rates of Asian economies. He said the growth "is not good considering we had a difficult economic environment last year," and "shows the Philippine economy continues to be resilient," but it still not good enough.

Ernesto Pernia, economist at the UP School of Economics, points to the big budget deficit as a reason why government spending is not having more economical services.

The NSDC expects GDP growth to slow this year to 3.5 percent or 4 percent, expectations of higher inflation and higher interest could dampen growth.

In its January 2010 Economic Outlook Briefing, the NSDC said the Bangko Sentral's "temporal" view of the economy in survey conducted from 20 percent to 30 percent of the firms polled said GDP growth would be lower than in 2009, while 35.7 percent said it would be the same as last year's.

Commenting on the survey, 73 percent of 36 respondents considered higher inflation this year, in the light of the fact that inflation growth 3.3 percent last year from 9.3 percents in 2008. The ramges of inflation on fluctuations, especially those of the low-income groups, have led to hostility responses to the fix multiple production costs of Petroleum products and the multiple production costs of Petroleum products

On playing 'Tonto' to 'Lone Ranger'

The government proudly claims that the Philippines has been elected chair of a special committee against narcotics. This is because, as say the least. The nation doesn't have the capacity to meet its obligations under that position. We do not have the resources. Our budget can hardly provide for the people's most needs.

We are entering even our feeling shame to lead the fight against terror. We communicate to send troops to Iraq even before we were formally asked to join the Coalition of the Willing. This is all because Senators Rodolfo Biazon and other defense top we do not get any meaningful or substantial benefits from the United States by playing "Tonto" to the "Lone Ranger" of the world.

We cannot help but ask: is our position on terrorism realistic? Does it serve ultimately our best interests as a result of disproportionate aid? The answer is obvious.

—REX JOHN D. LAMELA,
rlandsea@yana.com

LETTERS

What lion's share?

IN HIS column "Do neoliberals grieve and gullible men" (Business Section, PDI, 1/17/05) Professor C. General said: "With the foreigner nibbling all the dainty and taking all the risks, the Filipino people, through the national government, gets the lion's share of the after-tax profits. What more do we want?"

General is the first decade piece of foreign mining investors to claim that clarin. Others, led by Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Rolando Peril, could at least point only to the joke 100-percent foreign-owned companies would generate as duty earnings—and pocket—our natural wealth. But General failed to enlighten me his claim.

First of all, how much...income still, what percentage—of the "after-tax profits" of the 200 percent foreign-owned companies would be the Filipino people's "lion's share"? Under what law or jurisprudence, if any, is this profit-sharing scheme provided for?

Instead of subjecting plans and name to an unprovoked exercise in name-calling, General would do the nation a discourse by giving categorical answers to these questions.

—GREGORY GAY ENCINAS,
Unit 201 Eaton Square
Condominium,
143 11th Avenue,
Cubao, Quezon City

Erap was no tyrant

HERE are of those who speak with President Estrada as a typical tyrant. I can accuse Estrada in Quiroz that the former is in full control of his criminal faculties when he stated that he is ready to take up the cudgel for our countrymen who have lost hope in a never future under the current administration. There are many—De Quiroz included—who blindly believe whatever the elite and the crucial interest groups say about him in his administration. But the truth is that the Filipino masses continue to look up to him for guidance and comfort, especially in a time when the regime appears to have completely overlooked their welfare amidst the numerous economic collapse and wanton disregard for lives.

In De Quiroz' Jan. 16 column, he claimed that "the two Estrada"... were led by a humbug desire to seek revenge and reclaim the hope that had been stolen from us." There is no truth to the statement. President Estrada won the 1998 presidential elections with the widest margin ever recorded in Philippine electoral history. The reason who voted him into office were never outmoded about the corruptions was backed by his political enemies. Contrary to De Quiroz' claims, it was not the sovereign will of the people that led to President Estrada's ouster, but the will of a few who could not beat the thought of a President wrestling to the heels of the dust above the captains of a powerful few.

Jurisraj! The elite and Jaime Cardinal Sin answered journey under Erap's time. Under the wrongs administration, it is in every book and corner of nearly all the corpses in the country. Cardinal Sin himself and he'd accept money even from the devil. CBCP legal counsel in bishop admitted before Congress that the Church accepts gambling money. De Quiroz theatrical blink about doing his share in stopping this hypocrisy.

Corruption? Today the Philippines is ranked second among the most corrupt countries in the world. Or Erap's time, the Philippines was ranked 54th.

Aglipay merely doing his job

ATTY. JINGGOY Estrada's call for PNP chief Edgardo Aglipay to resign spoke baffles me.

I do understand that visiting ailing friends and relatives is part of our culture. I can therefore appreciate the request made by the senator to Aglipay that well-wishers be allowed to visit former President Estrada right after his return to Tanay from Hong Kong.

However, we should also understand that this was not a simple case of visiting an ailing person. The Tanay inn house is also Erap's place of incarceration and the circumstances at that time indicated a high level of security risk. It was Aglipay's job to manage the risk and he would have been negligent had he neglected the former president's every whim to the slightest level of danger. It is commendable to have public servants who risk the ire of our politicians in order to perform their jobs properly.

Sana, if there were plans to see Erap's return to again public dominance, then the news was Aglipay justified in not granting the request. In other case, Aglipay was merely doing the jobs he were to do.

And not one of his Cabinet members has exercised in any scandal or scam.

Today, the Inquirer scroll to the character of the women scams and scandals perpetrated in the last four years under the very nose of President Macapagal-Arroyo.

On the Filipinos' losing hope in Estrada's administration, De Quiroz fears he interring as the powerful few who could see many fats with their influence pudding wraps. (Remember the Mali Jimenez request on a sovereign-guaranteed IPPT). Certainly De Quiroz could not be referring to the Filipino masses, the millions of unnamed, faceless nonentities who continue to pin their hope for a better future on him, a actor down that President Estrada continues to fight. If some members of the media regard he friends with despicable and disdain, that is something he can live with.

—BENJAMIN P. DALMACIO, JR.,
spokesperson for President
Joseph Ejercito Estrada,
former representative, First
District, Magalianan

Question of the Week

Is the government justified to raise the value-added tax (VAT) from 10 percent to 12 percent? Why or why not?

Senders of e-text (E-text) published in Tuesday's **bagBox** *will each receive an "Inquirer Mag!"*

Across the NATION

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PAMPANGA SURVEY

Traders distrust execs on quarry

By Tonette Orejas
Philippine Lauren Bitak

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO—Most businessmen in Pampanga perceive the provincial capitol's system of collection for quarry taxes as tainted with corruption, a survey by the private sector representative in the regional development council (RDC) showed.

The survey, completed on March 1, showed that most of those polled favored contracting the state-owned National Resources Development Corp. (NRDC) as a collecting agent of quarry taxes, from Bataan, NDC businessmen across representation, and the business on Pampanga engaged.

Survey forms were distributed to 618 businessmen but only 331 of them accomplished the forms.

At least 85 percent of the respondents assisted the NRDC's presence collections. However, 10 and 12 percent did not specify any agency but wanted the government to stop corruption.

The rest reserved comments until they know the proposed system of check and balance but, nevertheless, stressed out suppliers engaged.

The survey was done a week after the Pampanga provincial board, voting 7-5, trashed Resolution No. 1, giving Gov. Mark Lapid the authority to enter into an agreement with the NRDC and depositing the corporate agency of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources as the governed government's collecting arm.

The proposed resolution was defeated even as Vice Gov. Josefino Cotiatco certified it as urgent. Cotiatco revealed alleged anomalies in the sand quarrying industry and noted the disparities in income.

Cotiatco referred to the DENR said, how the NRDC collected from 1999 to 2003 and the P45.2 million the office of the provincial treasurer generated from 2000 to 2004. They found the same amount of tax, which was P300 for every truckload of sand.

"[Local businessmen] want the income to be open on basic services and public infrastructures in support of the national government's efforts to kick the block problem," Bautista said, citing the responses culled from the survey done through text messages.

Bautista, he said, mentioned the accountability of Gov. Manuel "Lito" Lapid and his successor, his son-vice Mark Lapid, in the drop in revenues during their respective terms in office.

Senator Lapid declined to comment on the survey while Governor Lapid said efforts were being made to improve collections.

As chair of the quarry task force, the governor set the year's target at P80 million, lower by 9% million from NRDC's proposed minimum income of P36 million.

The governor called Cotiatco's allegations as "hot spur."

Bautista said the survey was done in preparation for discussions at RDC, a policy-making body composed of government agencies, local governments and the private sector.

Respondents also gave these views:

• "The Local Government Code [of 1991] supports Lapid's position. There's nothing wrong with the law. Apparently, the problem is with [the] officials implementing it. Let's file criminal cases if there's evidence of corruption."

• "Maybe the government would have a third party to run quarrying activities side-by-side with a government agency ... Maybe the entry cost of third party contractor could be defrayed by minimum in collections..."

Govs' group backs VAT hike for poor

By Jose A. Calderon
Philippine Bureau

TACLOBAN CITY—Legislators who voted in favor of a bill that would increase value-added taxes to 12 percent found themselves defending their positions yesterday as the country's governors' group of governors came out in support of the VAT hike amid protests.

Leyte Rep. Remedios Petilla said she voted in favor of the measure because the increase would "benefit the nation."

"We should help our national government raise the needed funds. And with this measure, there would be no doubt that we could achieve it," she said, dismissing allegations that her vote made her "anti-people."

In a press statement, the League of Provinces, the organization of governors in the country, said they supported the VAT increase and urged senators to approve the bill.

"As local leaders, we view with concern the hard line positions taken by some of our senators even before hearing the views of economists, tax experts and nongovernmental organizations that have seriously studied the VAT proposal," said league spokesperson Governor Erodoro of Eastern Samar.

The Bayan Muna in Eastern Visayas has expressed dismay at the region's 12 legislators who voted in favor of the VAT increase.

Melvin Bermo, regional secretary-general of the Bayan Muna-Ec and three congressmen should have rejected the measure.

"This only means that they don't really care about the plight of their poor constituents," he said.

On Monday, about 100 Bayan Muna members staged a rally at the Old Bus Terminal on Quezon Boulevard in this city to denounce the VAT hike.

Protesters also urged President Macapagal-Arroyo to use revenue from the VAT increase for pro-poor projects.

Gov tells traders: Deal with province

CITY OF BIKOLDE—Bulacan Gov. Josefina de la Cruz urged investors in the province to transact business directly with the provincial government to avoid being harassed by some local officials who demand 'grease money' in exchange for permits needed by their firms.

De la Cruz issued the appeal following a complaint from a group of investors that some officials of Bocaue town had demanded P10 million to speed up the release of permits and clearances for an industrial estate project.

She said the provincial government has set up a "one-stop shop" for investors where they can apply for all permits and licenses needed in their businesses.

The system, she said, was established through a memorandum of agreement (MOA) between the provincial government and the mayors of Bulacan's 23 towns and provinces.

De la Cruz said the MOA shared the powers of local governments in issuing licenses and permits to business, processing of investments and business opportunities in the province.

She said the mayors of World Wood Trading Corp., and the Construction and Estate Construction Corp., the firms behind the construction of the Bocaue Golden City Business Park, were not aware of the MOA and this could be the reason they dealt with the local government.

On Saturday, officials of Soldier, City accused Bocaue Vice Mayor Kimberly Molina and members of the town council of demanding P150 million from them in exchange for the issuance of permits and other documents that the investors would need in establishing the industrial park here.

Molina denied claims that he and members of the Bocaue council had asked P150 million from the investors. Carmelita Reyes, PDI Central Luzon Desk

Cebu City hospital loses all of its 4 surgeons

By Beatrix Magallanes
PDI Visayas Bureau

CEBU CITY—Four surgeons at the Cebu City Medical Center resigned on Monday protesting the city government-run hospital from handling major surgical cases.

Doctors Guy Agravill, Pedrollah Tudio, Sonny Oliveda and Dan Ruiz packed through with their plans to resign after hearing the comment of Mayor Tomas Osmeña that they were inefficient.

When sought for comment yesterday, Osmeña said the city would find other surgeons to replace the four who had resigned.

"Sorry if they got hurt [by my remark]. I'm not going to handle [hurt the 39-year-old] Tudio. He still has two people who don't have that kind of problem," the mayor said in a phone interview.

With their resignation, another legal controversy as veteran of shootings and stabbings would have to be referred to the Vicente Sotto Memorial Medical Center.

CCMC medical director Felicitas Matalino said she made a temporary arrangement with the Don Vicente Sotto hospital because of the lack of surgeons at the CCMC.

The surgeons announced their plan to resign last week due to their heavy workload at the hospital.

Matalino said the CCMC should have at least 12 surgeons. But since there were only four, she said they had to work 24 hours every other day.

Instead of leaving the next day, she added, the surgeons had to report for duty due to scheduled operations.

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NDF turns down Red Cross call for ceasefire

LUCENA CITY—The National Democratic Front has turned down the Philippine National Red Cross' call for a six-month ceasefire between government forces and New People's Army rebels in the seven most typhoon-ravaged municipalities of northern Quezon and Aurora.

Luis Jalandoni, NDF peace panel chair, said the NDF must ensure the safety of its commanders and permit its mass organizations.

"Therefore, it does not agree to a prolonged ceasefire for relief and rehabilitation work in calamity-stricken areas. There is no reason for the presence of US or government troops in those areas. Civilian agencies and people's organizations can very well do the relief and rehabilitation work," he said in an e-mailed statement in response to a query.

Proposal

Lara morch, Gen. Richard Gordon, PNRC chair, proposed a cessation of armed hostilities between the NPA and security forces to allow relief operations in calamity-stricken areas, most of which are rebel turfs.

"It has been more than three weeks since our call was made, but the government and NDF have yet to make known their official decisions, if any on this call," he said.

Gordon urged the government and the NDF to jointly to separately "take a first bold step in the interest of rehabilitation, peace and the people."

"We implore them to look at the matter more farsightedly beyond their respective tactical military considerations and beyond the current climate of hostilities in the area," he said.

Gordon said any area that was contested was always vulnerable to hostilities as the fighting units of both sides were very mobile.

"That is not the first and the last time that there will be calamities and calamity areas that are also war zones. We might as well work out humanitarian ceasefires now rather than regret more not having done so when we had the chance," the senator said.

Suspicion

But Jalandoni expressed apprehension that a prolonged ceasefire in calamity-stricken areas would be used by the government as a license to enter NDF territory and attack revolutionary forces and the people.

He claimed that the NDF was aware of relief experience in Mindanao, where the Armed Forces of the Philippines and the Philippine National Police, they said, repeatedly violated their ceasefire agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front by claiming they were running after so-called terrorists or criminals.

He said as a matter of principle, the NDF undertakes all efforts possible to provide assistance to communities adversely affected by calamities. Inquirer Southern Luzon Bureau

THE LUNAR new year ushers in new hope for Baguio as tourists flock to the city in droves, while city officials said resulted in a sharp drop in tourism revenues.

Towns near Baguio get crumbs in antimeningo funds

BAGUIO CITY—The Department of Health has poured all of its resources into containing the scrotal, as well as common tail, viability of the country's meningococcal epidemic to help it from meningococcemia.

But results apparently are all the city's neighboring towns, where cases of the fatal meningitis strain have been reported, will get, according to a Senate concession.

As of Monday, government doctors said no new cases had been added to the suspected and three confirmed meningococcemia cases in Benguet, and two were suspected cases in Mountain Province, Ifugao, Kalinga-Apayao and Ilocos Sur.

Baguio is still dealing with three confirmed meningococcemia cases out of 11 that have been recorded for the year, although health officials have already downgraded its alert status.

Benguet Mayor Mario Godin said his town is now coping with the stigma suffered by Baguio, now that Benguet is addressing 18 suspected cases starting January, while Mt. Province is addressing 21 suspected cases.

Paranoia

Baguio suffered an 80-percent drop in tourist arrivals during the Christmas holidays, the city's peak tourism period, due to paranoia brought on by the disease, according to Jim Dacanay of Tourism.

Godin said Ifugao is dealing with talks supposedly identifying Ifugao as the source of the disease that hit Baguio.

He said thieves broke into the Benguet General Hospital and took a box of antibiotics that government health personnel gave to some Ifugao residents to fight off the disease.

He said the CHD kept the theft under wraps "to avoid restlessness, more."

Health Secretary Manuel Dayrit released P500,000 to the city but most of the amount had gone to buying medicines, according to the office of the city administrator.

Banking with the remaining budget for 2004, the DOH managed to supply 13 Benguet towns with 20 to 30 capsules of the antibiotic ciprofloxacin and three to five bottles of rifampicin each, said Dr. Oliver Cruzabra, Ifugao health officer, during a Tuesday press conference here.

Insufficient

"So dealing our current strategy... history on [that was not enough]," he said.

"I don't know if [Cruzabra] intended to me, but I asked him to buy medicine and [medicine]... Government doctors said [if we need] to do is build up the [immune system]," Godin said. Provincial Cabinets, PNP Non-Metro Luzon Bureau

Outgoing energy chief urges oil companies to lower LPG prices

DAVAO CITY—Resigned Energy Secretary Vince Perez is calling on oil companies to roll back the prices of cooking gas (liquefied petroleum gas or LPG) following a decrease in world prices from $424 per metric ton in December to only $389 per metric ton in January.

Perez, who said he was elated over the economy's 6.1 percent growth despite the rising prices of oil in the world market last year, is now calling on oil companies to redress a roll back on prices of cooking gas.

"We're calling on companies for the rollback of LPG prices in February following this downward trend in the world prices," Perez, said during the launching of the Philippine Energy Plan (PEP) here yesterday.

"We don't say how much the companies should roll back, we leave it up to the industry to decide," Perez told reporters.

Deregulated

Government has deregulated the oil industry, leaving prices at the whim of the market. But Perez said oil companies have handed government reasons call in the past to roll back prices of oil.

The included a 30-centavo oil discount for public transport groups implemented in late November last year and a price rollback of LPG at P1 each, the latter of which was the P1 per kilogram cut implemented at the beginning of this year.

But Perez said he was happy that despite the rising prices of oil in the previous year, the economy was able to post a 6.1 percent growth in gross national product, exceeding the five-percent growth target last year.

"Oil prices in the world market rose by as much as 35 percent last year," Perez said. "But despite this, we were able to attain a 6.1 percent growth. We were suffering from the high prices of oil along with other countries like Nigeria, Argentina, even US and China, but still, we managed to exceed growth targets. This only means that our economy can survive external shocks."

Solutions

Aside from urging down-to-earth prices to the country's energy requirements in the next 10 years, the PEP also seeks to lessen dependence on imported oil by developing alternative fuels, like natural gas and ethanol, for the domestic consumption. Dzevallina A. Lacsamana, *PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Batangas City mayor cries foul over crime links

BATANGAS CITY—Mayor Hilario Dimacuha and his family cried foul over a story linking them to the operations of a crime syndicate in the province.

The mayor was linked to the arrest of a nightclub where police found two suspected members of a so-called Mafia of Batangas in San Pascual town Sunday.

Six policemen were hurt in a clash with suspected members of a hitman group that led to the arrest of eight gang members, including two suspected Chinese leaders who had a bounty of P600,000 for his capture.

The business story mentioned the supposed owner of Club Takara as Jun Dimacuha, a nephew of the mayor.

"I really feel very very bad. I don't know how the damage can be repaired. But please, please clear my father's name from the mafia link. We've been doing everything to establish good governance in Batangas City under my dad's leadership and the sudden linkage to the mafia activities was very unfair for us," lawyer Rogelio Dimacuha, the mayor's son, said.

"We don't tolerate smuggling, period, we even put a stop to the operation of small-time gambling," he said.

The business quoted the management of Batangas police provincial director Senior Supt. Francisco Montenegro, who linked Dimacuha to the club owner in a press conference Sunday.

The mayor said Jun Dimacuha, who was identified as his nephew, was his cousin.

"Jun is not my nephew, he is my cousin, the son of my uncle," the mayor said. "And even if he is, I stand on zero tolerance where the arrest was held... please don't connect that to me. It's really very unfair for me and my family." According to Mayor Dimacuha, the city's drive against criminality has been strictly enforced under the city's police chief, Supt. Carlito Tuplo.

"We've been working so hard to keep this city's peace and order and to leave a legacy of good governance. It hurts so terribly to see everything we've worked for just go up in smoke because of that incident," he said. *With* Magazine Gubbs, *PDI Southern Luzon Bureau*

Mayor survives gun attack in Jolo

JOLO, Sulu—Hand issues mayor Wilmen Asani escaped unhurt but his police escort was hit in the leg when gunmen fired at them in Jolo on Monday night.

Asani was sitting at the porch of his Transportation Office-provincial chief Ibrahimsan Mundak's house when fired upon by unidentified men.

Mundak and Asani are cousins. The mayor stays at Mundak's house whenever he is in Jolo.

Witnesses said the gunmen were on a motorcycle and in a Tamaraw van.

Police said they found 10 bullet casings from Armalite and M-14 rifles at the scene.

Senior Supt. Ismilon Jamil, Jolo police chief, said the attack could be politically motivated.

But Asani said he refuses to believe it has something to do with politics because his opponent in the last elections was a cousin, former Sulu Mayor Arthur Muktadir.

Sharif is an island municipality of the second district of Sulu, several hundred miles from mainland Jolo.

Meanwhile, Brig. Gen. Gabriel Habacon, commander of the 1st Tabak Infantry Division, said two soldiers were killed while three others were wounded when members of the 32nd Infantry Battalion clashed with suspected Abu Sayyaf rebels in Barangays Kapuk and Pangal in Maimbung town in Sulu yesterday morning.

Habacon said the bandits were led by a certain Albader Parad, *Ali General and Jolo S. Alipain, PDI Mindanao Bureau*

Subic remits P2.9B in taxes, duties to gov't

SUBIC BAY FREEPORT—The Subic Bay Metropolitan Authority (SBMA) has remitted to the national treasury P2.9 billion in cash from tax collections, including customs duties, income tax of workers and the pension given taxes of investors from January to December 2004.

SBMA Administrator Alfredo Antonio announced on Friday that the collection performance of the Bureau of Customs (BOC) and the Bureau of Internal Revenue (BIR) indicated "robust" economic activity here.

"This include the P1.9 billion customs collection derived from delayed payments and government re-government concession, the overall combined tax collections generated by the BOC and the BIR reached 16.2 billion for 2004 or 26 percent higher than the other year's figure of P3.1 billion," Antonio said in a statement.

He said the revenues collected by the two agencies exceeded last year's collections by P1.04 billion.

Port of Subic revenue collector Marietes Zamoranos said the bureau's cash collection of P2.3 billion came from domestic and foreign ship calls, unemployment operations and the taxes and duties paid by transport investors for the importation of heavy equipment and motor vehicles. Allen Macabenta, *PDI Central Luzon Desk*

Kin of Filipina killed in Japan promised justice

By Carla P. Gomez
PDI Visayas Bureau

BACOLOD CITY—Jose Bellosillo, parliamentary secretary for legal affairs, has assured that the Philippine Embassy in Japan is working to ensure that justice is served to the family of the former entertainer who was strangled to death by a Iranian lover.

"The Philippine Embassy will monitor the police investigation and filing of charges to ensure that justice is obtained for Reina Amorsolo," Bellosillo said.

Amorsolo, 22, of Talisay City, Negros Occidental, was strangled to death on Dec. 19 by Tatsuya Fukushi at their residence in Fuka City in Saitama Prefecture, a suburb of Tokyo.

Fukushi continued to the killing, which he claimed was done in self-defense.

Reina's family is asking the government to help them bring her body back to her home in Talisay City, about 7.3 km north of here.

Lourdes Jimenez said she wants to see the remains of her granddaughter Reina for the last time and give her a proper burial.

She said they also asked the government to bring home Kristel Reina-year-old daughter from her previous husband, a Japanese national, so they could take care of her.

Chan-Cristobal, consul general at the Philippine Embassy in Japan, said arrangements were being made with the funeral parlor in Tokyo for the shipment of Amorsolo's remains to the Philippines.

He said the embassy also asked the police in Fuka City to assist pressure on Fukushi to shoulder the repatriation cost of about $4000.

Cristobal quoted Japanese police as saying they negotiated with the parents of Fukushi but they refused to cooperate since they could not afford the amount.

He said the Fuka police told the embassy that they had set a meeting with Fukushi's employer for the latter to shoulder the cost.

If Fukushi's employer refuses to assume the cost of repatriating the remains of Amorsolo, alternative funding will be tapped, Cristobal said.

It was the employer of Fukushi who called the police when the latter confessed that he killed Amorsolo in a fit of jealousy.

JIMENEZ

INQUIRER Northern Luzon
Editor Joe Gonduyan
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Baguio learns lessons from meningo crisis

By Maurice Malanes
Baguio City

BAGUIO, the mountain resort city of food mecca-ries of lean-eyestores for many Filipinos, is striving to revive its economy after recently suffering the worst beating ever in 15 years. The situation has threatened to steal its longtime status of summer capital.

According to business people, the culprit for the crisis was the "restrictions to pass" about meningococcemia, a meningitis strain that reportedly claimed 22 lives in the Cordillera.

The reports, they say, gave potential tourists and visitors the misimpression that Baguio residents were dying left and right from the disease. Health officials stress that the disease has been a year-round sporadic occurrence, not only in Baguio but also elsewhere in the country.

The reported list of deaths and cases, which included non-meningococcemia cases such as an appendicitis patient (an engineer), helped feed public panic over the disease, says Dr. Charles Cheng.

Health officials generally, such as the Independent Cheering Cordillera Health, Education, Services and Training in the Cordillera Region), have pointed to "a basic lack of definite and widespread information dissemination" on the disease.

The "meningo panic," says Chairman, revealed the city's inability to effectively and efficiently manage crisis situations on a bigger scale, it reflects the "emotional mess of the Philippine public health care system" because the emergence of fear is usually 20 centavos per Filipino per day for health care while 40 percent of the national budget is used to pay off foreign debt, the group said.

But the blaming game is over.

Both the government and the private sectors are buckling down to work to revive the local tourism dependent economy, which, the regional tourism office says, has been losing an average of P87 million weekly since January.

Rays of hope

Seeing rays of hope after the health department lifted the public alert on the disease on Jan. 24, various sectors are coordinating activities to draw tourists and build confidence with the regional tourism office and the city government.

Among the active business groups are the Baguio Association of Hotels and Inns (Baha) and the Baguio Association of Restaurants (Bar).

Despite the outbreak of panic they have lost and continue to lose in the aftermath of the meningo panic that began last quarter of 2004, members of Baha and Bar are optimistic about early recovery.

"We have survived the earthquake and weathered several storms; we will survive the meningo also," they, "We shall overcome," says Baha member Michael del Rosario, referring to a 1990 earthquake which killed hundreds of people and battered Baguio's economy.

Peter Ng, another member, considers the current economic crisis as the worst to happen in 15 years after the 1990 quake.

The crisis, he says, has prompted him to let three fourths of his almost 100 workers to resign. Only three days a week for the remaining. Few guests have been checking in at his hotel since December.

Having seen worse times, Baha and Bar members are now banking on their unity and cooperation to help dispel the wrong public perception that a contagious disease has engulfed Baguio.

2 major events

The two groups are aiming the driving force behind two major city events this month—the annual celebration of the Spring Festival or Chinese Lunar New Year and the Panagbenga or Baguio Flower Festival.

The Chinese New Year countdown begins on Feb. 1 and culminates with a parade on Feb. 11, and the Panagbenga opens three days later with several crowd-drawing activities, such as a mass wedding of at least 100 couples on Valentine's Day.

A dancing competition will be held as an added spice to the usual street dancing and flower float parade.

Baguio Health Secretary Manuel Bayeti advised local officials to postpone the flower festival.

"But we (Baha) and Bar members want the flower festival to go on and show to the world that we in Baguio are not sick and dying," woman-star Edna Aroon says. "It's the economy that is sick (as a result of the meningo scare)."

Besides Baha and Bar, sports enthusiasts have embarked on what they call sports tourism to help revive tourist activities.

National tennis and car racing champion Carlos Arton, a Baguio resident, and fellow tennis and sports television host Mike Swanzalano have organized a national 4 x 4 car and motorcycle racing, which will be held on Feb. 12-13.

"My wish to show to the world that Baguio is still the best place for sports competitions," says Arton.

Basilio Antiporda of Camp John Hay also intends to follow in other Filipinos' footsteps with its mountain climbers and trailblazers, a still-among the best places for mountaineers.

She has organized several exhibitions called "Visionary Silvetas," which features the paintings of Philip Mayuyo, a gardener who dabbles in painting when he is not tending flowers or vegetables, at the John Hay Manor.

Reflections

As they count their losses from the crisis, the meningo panic created, some entrepreneurs are reflecting on the faith dimension of what befell them.

"After the 1990 earthquake, we became closer with our neighbors, and we became more united in striving to revive our city's economy," says Aroon. "But if we are recovered and we were making good money, we have become complacent. Maybe this (meningo crisis) is God's way of telling us not to rest on our laurels."

Besides the 1990 quake and the meningo crisis, the city had seen much worse times, says Councilor Gilberto Teodoro Jr. He cited how the city's economy was also blown in 1972 when it rained continuously for two months.

"In that time (1972), everyone became a worshipper of the sun, which had not shone for 40 days," he recalls.

And he notes some blessed paradox of all these crises—people coming and uniting together to overcome a problem that transcends classes and political affiliations.

"This unity and coming together I consider very dear things that keep us together are greater than those that divide us," he says, saying how businessmen are aside their competitive tendencies and the politicians their political differences during crisis.

"I hope we can make this a habit to good or bad times," he says.

For regional tourism director Purificacion Molintas, one lesson from the meningo crisis is that the local tourism-based economy relies largely on the health, hygiene and sanitation of the city.

SEN. RICHARD Gordon visits the Baguio public market to boost the city's resolve to attract tourists back after the meningo scare.

'Someday, we can have a blind Filipino grandmaster'

By Frank Cimatu
Baguio City

THE MEXICAN chess legend Bobby Fischer, back when he was young and fixated on his game, once testified a player that he should not leave in the opening of his game and promptly lost.

The "touch move rule" is more symbolized in non-amateur games. If you touch one of your opponent's pieces, you must capture that piece. If you want to adjust the position of a piece without moving it, you must say "adjust" or "I adjust" before you touch the piece.

But last month, during a chess tournament at the Wrecker's Pack in Baguio City, "touch move" was the rule. In fact, if the six players did not touch their pieces, they would have no way of playing.

This was the third Ichiban ng Pasko-blind chess tournament. Unlike other tournaments where players and the audience were so quiet you could hear the ticking of chess clocks, the game was so loud that one of the players was complaining that he could not concentrate.

And concentration is the key to blind chess.

Remember that scene in "Searching for Bobby Fischer" where actor Ben Kingsley, as the legendary chess teacher Bert Pandolfini, swiped the chess pieces off the board and ordered the characters of Josh Waitzkin to play the game? That is how the blind players play.

Joaquin Roberg, 22, a masseur at night and piano player and singer for a music lounge, said it took him a while to transform the game in his mind.

"I have been playing for 13 years now and I still rarely get defeated," he said.

Telling Ichiban who were orienting some of the players' moves, tournament organizer Stan Padilla told them that they could play with the champion later.

Blindfolded

"So long as you play blindfolded," Padilla said. There were no takers.

To play blindfolded, players use a special kind of chess set.

The official tactile chess set has the "white" squares rendered in to distinguish them from the "black." Squares are filled with a hole into which the pieces fit. The "black" chess pieces have spikes in the corresponding holes underneath the "white" pieces.

But in Baguio, it is the other way around. The "white" squares are raised. Set only are the black pieces with a pin protruding for the bases of the black pieces are also grooved to distinguish them.

Playing blind, Tampinig was forced in his first game by his opponent's knight to move his king and capture his bishop.

Tampinig's game is similar to actor Laurence Fishburne in "Searching for Bobby Fischer." He constantly talks to his opponent, saying how he is setting up a good move to take him out of his reach. Most he is on the attack, Tampinig is literally on his opponent's face.

In fact, in that particular game, Tampinig won and became the champion of the tournament three years in a row. He pocketed P1,000, while Roberg, who placed third, won P500.

Tampinig said they lulled shortwords and professional guidance. In the United States, for example, a quarterly publication for blind players is set to come out. There are also computer programs that speak the moves and recommend moves for players.

Padilla said he planned to invite chess masters to teach the players the winning strategies. "Maybe someday we can have the first blind Filipino grandmaster," he said.

[THOSE who have extra chess sets they want to donate to blind players may contact Stan Padilla at 0914.5.360377].

SOME Baguio residents enjoy a game of chess in one of the city's parks.

AGGETA Lumarna, star performer of the Balikatan Women's Group, dances to the beats of "Kapre, Bilog" during the recent Longganiza Festival in the City of Vigan in Ilocos Sur. CONTRIB

When gays are gay in 'longganiza' fest

A GAY platoon headed the 3rd Longganiza Festival in the ultra-conservative heritage city of Vigan and almost came out straight winners.

The Garbellos, composed of 25 street dancers, were the crowd favorites in last month's parade and were close second to the three-time winner Balikatan Women's Group, whose members have been billed as the "living inspiration."

The Garbellos brought the search gun to the Diocese of Ilocos Sur/Vigan and had the loudest applause. Twenty of them were decked up in blue and black brassiere (bra-cloth) g-strings and a skimpy bra made of cane/loose ribbons with Vigan longganiza as panel.

They also wore hat/beanie made of longganiza strands and accessorized longganiza. They danced, high-kicked and did their leg split on the cobble-stoned Calle Crisologo fronting the ruins of the Virra Gerbabos' "Elog," adapted as "Crochet Vigan."

Yet men with spears of giant longganiza sometimes cursed the Garbellos as their dance routines. The cursed men chose to respond to the Garbellos' hard taste followed them from the St. Paul's Cathedral to the Vigan Heritage Village.

Vigan Mayor Ferdinand Medina said this was the first time they allowed an all-gay group to join the street dance and the result was pure entertainment. "The crowd loved them," he said.

Medina said the Garbellos were composed of musicians and engineers who worked as designers, hairdressers and professionals in Vigan and in nearby towns. Some of them were members of the Mix Gay Vigan held during the celebrations.

The groups of dancers participated in the parade. All wore Vigan longganiza as wigs, belts, necklaces and bracelets. Some wore the longganiza, of course, were replicas made of stockings, art paper and plastic and dyed to a golden to deep brown.

Two years ago, the genesis of Longganiza Festival, but the dancers complained that they were too greasy and heavy to dance with. Last year, they had art workshops to create bike-ing panties.

The Balikatan Women's Group, members of the adult category, stirred the aisles, wearing multi-colored socks, blue tight skirts that looked like sausage casings, Kambalitan caps and feather masks.

Bobbie Lumarna, described as the "living longganiza," could have won the most graceful dancer award.

The University of Northern Philippines won in the student category with its Chinese-inspired red cheongsam made from abel ilocs and laced with longganiza. Frank Cimatu

Cabanatuan eyes longest native sausage

CABANATUAN City wants to be known also as a "producer of the best-tasting and quality longanisa." And to highlight this goal, residents are displaying today ready-to-roast native sausages that will stretch to at least 2.5 km.

The display, which is slated to be the longest line of longanisa in the country, is one of the highlights of the city's 55th founding anniversary celebration on Jan. 31-Feb. 1.

"The fact is that the Cabanatuan longganisa is a unique sausage affer most products here and we want to showcase it through the display," said Councilor Ducapat Agustin, chair of the celebrations.

She said the display would be longer than those assembled some years back in Lucena City, which was 2,213 km, and Makati City, which was 1,236 m.

"It will definitely be a record-setting line," she added.

Most vendors from the two public markets in Cabanatuan will display their products in stands arranged along the main street starting at 7 a.m.

The pieces of longganisa, with an average length of 9 cm and a diameter of 4 cm each, will be tied end to end to form the display line.

Agustin said the festivities would include a bamboo-band competition, featuring street dancing performances by participants garbed in attire accessorized by bamboo doors and a parade of floats made of bamboo. Jonathan Roque

Peso breaks into 54 level

THE RESOUNDING gain hits one of its highest levels in a year as the country's economic prospects improve. EDWIN BACASMAS

[Paragraph #1]

(overseas Filipino workers) industry," said Kevin de Guzman, chief foreign exchange dealer at Banco Santander de Filipinas.

"If you're noticed, most of the dealers coming out now the last two weeks have been generally positive," he said.

CalPERS staying

Retailers said the peso rally was buoyed by the higher-than-forecast 4th quarter growth and the country's passing grade given by the rating arm of California Public Employees' Retirement System (CalPERS).

CalPERS has an estimated $88 million worth of portfolio investment in the Philippines. It is the third largest pension fund in the US, and the $170 billion worth of assets, part of which is invested in emerging markets.

CalPERS decided to stay after its consultant kept the country protection on the list of permissible investment sites.

Philstar Consulting said the Philippines got passing marks in the seven basic criteria of a permissible investment site—market liquidity, political stability, transparency, productive labor practices, capital market openness, settlement problems and macroeconomic.

Reid Ang, a member of the government's technical staff working on countering CalPERS to keep its investments in the country, said officials of Philstar would meet with CalPERS on Feb. 14, when the annual review of the Philippines would be presented.

She said being on the list meant that the country got a score of at least 3 points.

"This success can be attributed to many factors—formation of which is the resolve of the administration of President Macapagal-Arroyo to institute far-ranging reforms to sound strengthening the country's economic and political foundations," Philippine Ambassador to the United States Albert del Rosario said in a statement.

A Philippine delegation led by Del Rosario earlier talked with officials of CalPERS and Philstar to present reasons why the country still had a good investment climate despite a negative perception.

Philippine stocks to market liquidity and volatility," Del Rosario said.

Talks of a possible exclusion of the Philippines from the list of permissible investment sites arose after the country's credit rating was downgraded.

International ratings firm Standard & Poor's last month downgraded by a notch the country's foreign currency debt rating to BB- from B+, citing the country's lingering fiscal problems.

Fitch Ratings, for its part, downgraded its outlook for the Philippines from stable to negative last month, citing its inaction to the country's fiscal standing. Moody's Investors Service has yet to give its verdict on the Philippines next month, although there are fears it might follow the lead of S&P.

Investments in agro, food

Raul Fernandez, vice president of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry said CalPERS expressed interest in increasing its investments in the Philippines, focusing in money into food processing agriculture and food processing.

Fernandez went to the United States as a member of a top-notch delegation that asked the pension fund to continue investing in the Philippines.

He went with fellows Gov. Josefina Mendiola de la Cruz, and together with the rest of the delegation, they urged CalPERS to invest in projects that would boost economic activities in towns and provinces.

"That image now will be in a better light because CalPERS is a big infrastructure," Hernandez said. While a report from Reuters

Critics to GMA: What growth? Growth for whom?

[Paragraph #1]

It attributed the increased GDP to the services sector, which is found to have contributed the most with 3.37 percentage points. It trailed the top contributors as trade, transportation, communications and storage, and private services.

But a skeptical Ilan Jean-Marye JV Epresto, a son of natural Pres. dent Joseph Estrada, suggested that the figures had been mixed up.

"Administration officials are so happy with new numbers," Epresto said on the phone. "Sana, next can be window-dressed to make it appear [that the economy is doing OK]."

Socioeconomic Planning Secretary Romulo Neri was quick to reply to a request for comment.

"The NSCB has a separate, distinct organization. The numbers are reliable statistics persons on statistics. You can ask any reputable economist in the country," he said in a text message.

What growth?

According to Mariano, only big businesses are happy over the supposed growth, because they are the ones mostly profiting from it.

"What growth, you Mr. Arroyo's spin doctors talking about?" he said. "Galunggong (the poor man's fish) nasa mon (P100/kg) kilo. The President must try living on a measly P200 minimum wage a day."

Rep. Crispin Beltran, also of Anakpawis, said the majority of 51 ...ipinos did not appreciate the growth figures because those did not accompanied by improved economic conditions for them.

He said the Arroyo administration had done nothing but hamper the working class with taxes.

Beltran also pointed out that the government was relying heavily on the remittances of OFWs when it could not even provide adequate services to them.

He cited the government's supposed weak stand on the changes in Japan's employment policy concerning Filipino entertainers.

Growth for whom?

Bayan's flyers cited figures from the National Statistics Office (NSO) showing that the daily cost of living had risen from P450.94 in 2003 to P492.34 by the end of 2004.

He said the government itself, through the NSO, had admitted that the purchasing power of the peso had fallen from P6.50 to P6.33 during the same period.

The inflation rate has also gone up from 3.1 percent in 2003 to 7.9 percent in 2004.

"At face value, there may be some growth," Bayan said. "The question is, for whom? Not for the poor, it seems. (The government's) own data say so."

Mayor Epresto said that even if the economy had indeed done better than expected, the "trickle" was that the people were having a hard time coping with soaring prices and an iffy bills.

Not trickling down

"I don't see [the growth] trickling down. It's not felt by ordinary people," he said, adding:

"If everything is doing well, how come they are raising taxes?" he said. Reports from Cynthia D. Balloma, Jhaemar Bordadora, Julpa A. del Prado and Jill C. Gabrenaya-an A

Solons want IPPs, lawyers, doctors to pay VAT

[Paragraph #1]

In an apparent sign that it may be softening somewhat on its stance to hold a VAT rate increase to 12 percent from 10 percent, Malacañang conceded there was a need to "refine" the proposed tax bill.

But the palace made it clear that the President Macapagal-Arroyo was dead set on a vote increase. Not even an appeal by Catholic Church officials or street protests or a million signatures from those opposed to it would change her mind.

The VAT bill is the most potent of Malacañang's revenue measures, with at least P35 billion in additional revenues expected from it.

Exempted no longer

Taxlet Rep. Joel Lagos, chair of the House ways and means committee, said the following would be brought into the 12-percent VAT fold:

- Independent power producers (IPPs)
- Petroleum products
- Importation of semi-going vessels, including engine and spare parts of said vessels to be used by the operator himself as operator.
- Medical, dental, hospital and veterinary services
- Legal services

According to Lagos, imposing a VAT on IPPs would yield at least P1 billion for the government while taxing petroleum products would translate into P4 billion in more revenues.

On the other hand, a total of P1.6 billion in VAT was expected to be generated from the professional fees of doctors, another P500 million from lawyers, and P200 million from senior-going vessels.

Vessels plying inter-island routes were still exempt from VAT.

Correcting distortions

"This is part 2 of the VAT legislations," Lagos said. "It aims to rectify the distortions brought about by exemptions."

Lagos said that services, sales and transfers of properties were not to be included in the exemptions, all had a preemptive legal tax of one percent.

However, those items can still be subject to further increase, he said.

Lagos said the committee recognized the plight of the common tao over and this was why it was still exempt from the VAT.

The Lagos committee report will soon go to the committee on rules for inclusion in the calendar of business so that it can be scheduled for plenary debate and voting.

In the case of petroleum products, these were also subject to a preemptive legal VAT because of the increases in the prices of ...ese materials used.

Hendico said blood, on the other hand, are still included in the VAT coverage because these do not fall into the category of items and standard.

First things first

House Minority Leader Prospero Nograles said the committee should have completed first the bill on the reorganization of the VAT before it passed the bill increasing the VAT.

"This is what they should have done in the first place—passed a measure that will curb collection inefficiencies then did not increase the burden of taxpayers [by passing the] bill insofar as increasing the VAT by 20 percent or an addition of 2 [percentage points]," Nograles said.

"In our view, the lifting of certain exemptions will not hit the ordinary consumers, unlike the 20-percent increase in VAT, which will definitely hit the poorest of the poor," he stressed.

List of exemptions

Among the transactions still exempted from VAT in increase in VAT were:

- Sale of medicinal agricultural products; marine and house products in their original state by the primary producers or the owner of the land where the same are produced.
- Sale of cereal and cereal seeds in their original state, and rotgut.
- Sale, printing or publication of books and any newspaper, magazines, review or bulletin which appears at regular intervals with fixed prices for subscription and sale, and which is not devoted principally to publication of paid advertisements.
- Sale or importation of agricultural and marine food products in their original state, livestock and poultry of a kind generally used as, or yielding or producing foods for human consumption; and breeding stock and genetic materials.
- Sale or importation of fertilizers, seed, seedlings and fingerlings, fish, poultry, livestock and poultry feeds, including ingredients, whether locally produced or imported, used in the manufacture of finished feeds for farm animals, fighting cocks, aquarium fish, pets, animals and other animals generally considered as pets.
- Importation of personal and household effects belonging to the residents of the Philippines coming in from abroad and nonresident citizens coming to reside in the Philippines.

Open to compromise

Earlier, at Malacañang, Press Secretary Ignacio Bunye said that their there was an "emerging consensus" that the tax bill, or at least the House version, had to be further refined "to really cushion the impact of the bill as far as the low-income classes are concerned."

"We're open to refinements," Bunye stressed.

"The experts have been doing their numbers. They've been analyzing the different figures and the committee at that same consensus can be given without drastically reducing the intended revenues," Bunye said.

But he said Malacañang was still hoping to have P80 billion from all tax measures.

While open to amendments, Bunye stressed that Mr. Arroyo would not be deterred by protests against the measure.

"The President's position is no matter the VAT and it can be refined to address the concerns of our people. In other words, the issue of our competitive will not be severely affected," Bunye said.

Bunye said not even protest rallies in Jolo would stop the government from pursuing VAT.

GMA firm on VAT hike

"This is needed by our country and the President will stand pat on it," Bunye said. "The President is standing up to this because the country needs this."

Asked how Malacañang would react if some influential groups, like the Church, opposed the bill or filed a large number of Filipinos staged a rally at Jolo or launch a signature drive to show their dislike for the VAT hike, Bunye said the President would not backtrack.

"Those are efforts of the democratic processes," said Bunye who dismissed speculation that some groups would use the ground anti-VAT to destabilize the government.

Bunye said other proposals to anticipate the impact of the VAT increase would be welcome.

Consumers' view

A consumer watchdog proposed that power generators be subjected to zero-percent income taxes instead of lifting the VAT on emporcher enjoyed on projects that that would ultimately result in higher power rates.

Consumer and Oil Price Watch Group Chair Dimpna Lim expressed strong opposition to the imposition of VAT on the power sector, but said he was amenable to the chopping of a 1-percent VAT on the industry, if only as a compromise.

He said a 2-percent VAT imposition should translate into an average 19.4-a-month increase in the electricity bills of Manila Electric Co. customers.

Mass protest on Feb. 14

The Bagong Alyansang Makabayan, an alliance of militant groups, plans nationwide protests on Feb. 14 against the proposed VAT increase.

"We've been getting positive responses from various regions and provinces who are protesting the new tax measures," Bayan secretary general Renato Reyes said. With reports from Abigail L. Ho, Norman Bordadora

No more 'Little Mister and Miss Kuliglig' contests

[Paragraph #1]

Public schools would no longer be holding beauty contests, talent searches, sports fests, nor even parades and similar extra-curricular activities during school days.

Education Secretary Florencio Abad put the foot down on what he deemed were unnecessary preoccupations which would take both teachers and students away from the serious business of learning.

Dismal

He partly blamed the frequent class suspensions for the dismal results of the achievement tests of public school students and teachers.

"If a boy nothing to do with school learning, it should be done outside of school hours. So there should be no more searches for 'Little Mister and Miss Kuliglig,'" Abad said.

According to a draft order, which Abad said he would sign soon, classes would no longer be suspended on account of a United Nations Day parade, a Boy Scout or Girl Scout jamboree, Lingga ng Wika program, sports intramurals and the like.

The school should hold these extra-curricular events on weekends or during summer vacation so they would not interfere with classes, he said.

Drastic measures

Abad's draft order, titled "Instituting measures to increase engaged time on task and ensuring compliance therewith," would oblige teachers and students to devote all 300 school days to quality teaching and learning.

"The performance of our students is not only characterize—it is unacceptable," Abad said, explaining why the department had to take such "drastic" measures.

He noted that on hours of classes a day was hardly enough.

"There is not enough time for our students to develop basic competencies in Math, Science and English. We only have 10 hours [daily] for classes. The need to maximize the little time we have," he said.

The Department of Education's Special Events Unit has a long list of cultural and historical events that celebrate the value of classes. These are Independence Day (June 12), Bonifacio Day (Nov. 30), National Heroes' Day (Aug. 29) and Rizal Day (Dec. 30).

On top of the five other local celebrations such as the Philippine Independence Day for Baler, Quezon; the Lapu-Lapu day celebration in Leyte and Tarlac City, various hero's days like Gen. Antonio Luna in Abbey and Lapulapu City, Gen. Leandro Pullido in Malolos, the late President Manuel L. Quezon in Quezon City and different foundation days for each city.

During Oh Day (Oct. 28) and Lingga ng Wika (Aug. 31), classes are generally suspended to make way for parades and special programs.

Only after school hours

Starting June, according to Abad's order, classes would no longer be suspended "even while there are school celebrations of important historical events or significant occurrences" such as 20th Day, action Day, School Inservice Month, Reinforcement Month, ARAL (Araw ng Kalayaan).

The holding of school contests in support of national programs should be conducted outside of school hours, he said.

Even meetings of school clubs, organizations and other student co-curricular activities should be held only after class hours.

Activities that would take one or two days such as field days and Girl Scout camping or school sports competitions should be conducted in weekends or during the summer, Abad said.

Make up class

School athletes and contestants for academic and non-academic competitions would only be allowed to practice after class hours or during non-school days.

Only schools with official school papers would be allowed to participate in local schools' press conferences.

As for teachers, training programs should only be taken during the summer break or during the Thursday and Friday, not on school days, Abad said.

At the end of the school year, all division superintendents would be required to submit a report on the school number of school days every school.

"We will be very strict in requiring make up classes," Abad warned.

DOH CLEARS CONCESSIONAIRE

Booster pumps eyed in Pasay outbreak

By Blanche S. Rivera

THE DEPARTMENT of Health yesterday urged the Pasay City government to investigate reinstalled booster with booster pumps in Barangay 123, effectively aborting transmission of liquefied Pasay Services Inc. for the water contamination in the area that affected 39 residents over the weekend.

DOH National Capital Region Director Gerardo Bayugo said Maynilad was already doing repairs on old pipes and had set up water rationing stations in Barangay 123, where 39 residents had been confirmed as suspected typhoid cases.

Bayugo said the DOH team that went around during the weekend had identified an enemy, Yaldex Doodle, which had set up a booster pump that repeatedly sucked the water supply from houses in the neighborhood.

Yaldex Doodle, the name said, had sold water to the residents who had complained of the foul smell of water in their households. The enemy's water supply, however, was also contracted.

Bayugo said the team could not identify how many other booster pumps were in the area, but said these were responsible for building up a negative pressure in the pipes, and allowing bacteria from human waste to seep in.

"We have given instructions to accelerate everything inside Yaldex Doodle, and to stop rehabilitations or residences from putting up booster pumps," Bayugo told the barangay.

"The DOH, however, said it could not take any action against the enemy or those with booster pumps because these were under the jurisdiction of the local government," he added.

The DOH official said the monthly water sampling done in Metro Manila showed that the water supply in the country contained the normal and acceptable residual chlorine level of 2.mg/liter in December.

Bayugo said it would be good to look into the possible sanctions against utility companies and restablishments found responsible for contaminating water sources.

"It would be unfair, however, if we blame Maynilad for the outbreak. It immediately acted when the problem was reported," Bayugo said.

"The system has been there for over 50 years. Maynilad just took over, and it is the one doing repairs now," he said. Maynilad supplies water to Barangay 123 and its neighbors.

Bayugo noted that the probable cases of typhoid had decreased last month, with only four cases in the last week of January, compared with 13 cases in the third week, 14 cases in the second week, and eight cases in the first week.

The DOH and the Pasay City health team visited Barangay 123 again yesterday to check on the health situation of the residents, and to make sure that they did not miss a probable case of typhoid.

The Research Institute for Tropical Medicine is expected to come out with the results of laboratory tests on the stool samples of the 39 sick residents today.

BACK TO SCHOOL

Pupils of Generoso Santiago Elementary School alike and by a big fire that hit the school's hold classes at the lobby of another school building.

No law, but statutes cited vs cybersex dens

By Lelia B. Salaverria

IN THE ABSENCE of specific laws targeting cybersex operations, the Manila police would be using the statutes against pimps (solicitation) and exhibition of offensive or immoral materials to prosecute operators of dens offering sexual services via the Internet.

The move was in response to a directive of President Macapagal-Arroyo to crush down on cybersex dens, said Western Police District director Chief Supt. Avelo Bulalacao.

"Cybersex is a species of pornography and a crime against morals under the Revised Penal Code," Bulalacao said in a statement.

Junior Assistant Raul Gonzalez yesterday also urged his former colleagues in Congress to pass a law that specifically penalizes operators of cybersex dens.

Gonzalez warned that these dens would continue to proliferate if no specific law was passed against it.

"A law should be passed to cover this offense. Only the Revised Penal Code is quiet about it. There are like opium dens," Gonzalez said.

Bulalacao said Article 200, which penalizes grave scandal, and Article 201, which penalizes the exhibition of shows or works that are contrary to law, public order, morals and good customs, can be used against operators of Internet shops that offer a special form of prostitution.

The penalty for violation of Article 200 is one to six days imprisonment or public censure. Violators of Article 201 would face a jail sentence of six months and one day to six years, or fined from P6,000 to P12,000, or both.

The special form of prostitution is conducted via the Internet and the use of webcams, by inviting people in other countries to watch Filipino women perform sexual acts in exchange for a fee paid via credit cards. The lucrative operation has lured many young, and sometimes underage, girls to the trade.

Bulalacao said Manila police-men have begun monitoring computer shops which could be providing cubicles where cybersex is performed. Shops caught engaging in such activities face closure by the city government.

Gonzalez also agreed with the police that the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act of 2003 was not enough to prosecute and penalize operators of cybersex dens.

He added that while some cities might have ordinances against them, a law was still needed for a nationwide crackdown against cybersex dens.

With Philip C. Salaverria

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Rodriguez folk hit 'quarrying'

By Luigie A. del Puerto

BELIEVE me, it is not quarrying, so says the mayor of Rodriguez, Rizal.

Mayor Isidro Ciangio said yesterday that he was appreciating the blasting of rocks in a village in Barangay San Rafael.

This, he said, was part of a clearing operation to develop the area into a property townsite.

A contractor hired by the town to clear the land would be selling the rocks gathered from the site to stone crushers, he said.

"We have hired a contractor to clear the area. As for the rocks, it will also make," Ciangio said.

That is not the first time that quarrying is suspected at the site in Sitio K.C. covering less than a hectare.

Ciangio said someone used to gather rocks in the area and remove all kinds of equipment to use to hide it by calling the act a "road widening project." He has since stopped the practice, Ciangio said.

The mayor said he was not doing the same.

"I don't think we will be accused of quarrying. People have some doubts because there used to be quarrying here, and they just called it a road widening project," he said.

"This is simply an infrastructure project," he said. "It's not quarrying."

Controlled blasting

Ciangio said he needed to clear some space using "controlled blasting" because the area is a hill.

Some residents are accusing the municipal government of quarrying or of allowing private individuals to quarry in the site when nobody has a permit to do so.

A surveyor of some of 20 families living near the blasting site, called GMA radio yesterday to complain about the activity.

"They are about to blast the rocks already," the caller, a woman, said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Ciangio said the town had an environmental compliance certificate to build the municipal hall and a housing project it has the rights.

But why build a municipal hall on area already tainted with accusations of being a quarry site? Also, why build a municipal hall?

"The mayor said the town has no other space in the area, save this site, for the terminal.

"There are many jeepneys in this area, and they just park by the roadside. We need to build a terminal," he said. "It is also a livelihood program. People can [later] sell their products here."

Rodriguez is no stranger to quarrying operations. It supplies much of the rock to quarrying operations of construction firms in Metro Manila.

Trash scheme to include homes

By Tarra V. Quismundo

THE MANILA Department of Public Services (DPS) has expanded to "no segregation, no collection" of garbage" policy from food chains and shopping centers to households in the city.

Starting with the pilot district, the DPS would be requiring residents to turn in their waste already segregated from other trash that could be recycled for sale or junk shops.

"We are now on a massive information campaign on garbage segregation all over Manila, but we do not involve the [Manila Disposal Systems] because that is the place we feed a huge incinerator in terms of garbage collection," said DPS chief Isabel Borromeo.

"It was a unanimous decision in our meeting with Director Ga-ut March 1 because residents there had been receptive to our programs. And, of course, because Mabuchang a there, we have to show that we could make the mayor's seat of power follow the policy first," said DPS operations head Jesus Portales.

An expansion of the city's implementation of Republic Act 9003 or the Ecological Solid Waste Management Act of 2001, the program has been in place in some 100 free-standing food chains, and would be implemented in shopping malls this month.

Portales said the DPS would also target the other districts, but only after District 4 registered a hundred percent compliance.

The DPS projected that the "no segregation, no collection" policy would reduce the required garbage collection in District 4 by at least 25 percent.

METRO BRIEFS

Gozing to be arrested

THE MANILA City Regional Trial Court (RTC) has issued a warrant for the arrest of actress Rosanna Roces. Judge Ricardo Rosario ordered the police to arrest Roces, whose real name is Jennifer Bidiza, after she failed to attend yesterday's hearing on the libel case filed against her by former surgeon Noel Belo. The lawyers of Prince Manolo denied allegations that the hearing despite notice, according to Branch 6 Clerk of Court Atty. Ma. Victoria de Castro. The actress is said to have left the country and will be back on March 10. *Jocelyn Valle*

LAS PIÑAS FISH PORT

LAS PIÑAS is hoping to become the new fish trading center of southern Metro Manila after it opened its own fish port recently. The fish port is a part project of Sen. Manuel Villar and Rep. Cynthia Villar.

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PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005

METRO

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Editor Ester G. Dipasupil ■ Assistant Editor Canon B. Bibe

WARNING TO DRIVERS

MMDA to restart seizing licenses because of TRO

By Margaux C. Ortiz

DRIVERS, be ready to part with your licenses and spend long hours redeeming them once a temporary restraining order (TRO) on the Metropolitan Traffic Ticket (MTT) scheme is enforced.

That was the warning of Metro Manila traffic director Angelito Vergel de Dios as he disclosed that they were preparing to go back to the old system of issuing traffic violation receipts (TVRs).

"We have no choice but to bring back the old scheme despite the inconvenience it would cause drivers," Vergel de Dios said.

He added that they still had 860 TVR booklets to issue to erring motorists.

He said the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority (MMDA) would be printing 1,200 more booklets to cover the 20-day duration of the TRO.

"The old scheme entails the confiscation of violators' licenses," Vergel de Dios said, adding that motorists have to line up at a designated redemption center to redeem their licenses.

Payment in banks

With the MTT, traffic violators needed only to pay the fine at any Metrobank branch in the country.

"The old scheme would require thousands of road violators to line up at our temporary redemption center in Orense (Makati)," the Metro traffic director said.

Last week, Judge Cesar Santamaria of the Makati Regional Trial Court Branch 145 issued a 20-day TRO on three MMDA traffic schemes including the MTT, No Contact Traffic Apprehension (NCTA) and Organized Bus Route (OBR).

The order was in response to a petition by nine transport groups which claimed that the implementation of the schemes trampled on "their constitutional right to due process which necessarily include their right to life."

Meanwhile, the MMDA is set to ask the Makati RTC to increase to P20 million the P100,000 bond it is asking the transport groups to cover damages the agency may incur because of the TRO.

"The original bond amount is too small," MMDA Chair Bayani Fernando said Monday, adding that the agency earned P500,000 a day for the MTT scheme alone.

Robbers kill clerk during cell phone rob

By Edson C. Tandoc Jr.

WHEN she refused to give her cellular phone, robbers shot her in the head, right in front of her house, a few meters from a church in Quezon City the Monday night.

Ivy Diwa, 24, underwent surgery at the Quirino Memorial Medical Center but died at about 2 p.m. yesterday, Rev. Fr. Robert Reyes told the Inquirer.

Because of the killing, fear has swept the community, said Reyes, parish priest of Miraculous Medal Church in Project 4, Quezon City.

"Our people are now afraid of walking in the dark," Reyes said.

A report from the Central Police District said Diwa, a clerk at an ink refilling station, was walking on her way home on Legaspi Street in Barangay Marilag at 11:50 p.m. when the incident took place.

According to witnesses, two men on board a motorcycle, with one armed with a handgun, tried to grab her Nokia 3210 cell phone.

She resisted and tried to run to their house, Reyes said, quoting witnesses.

But the robbers opened fire at her, hitting her in the head.

The victim fell to the ground right in front of their house. The robbers quickly drove away.

Reyes said this was not the first time a parishioner fell prey to street robbers.

Residents have been pointing to robbers on a motorcycle as behind the series of cell phone robberies in Project 4, he said.

Speaking for the neighborhood, Reyes asked the police and the barangay not only to solve the case but to prevent other crimes like this.

Diwa was the first victim killed.

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005 PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

SPORTS

Editor Teddyboy S. Melendres

Pals eye No.2; forfeiture dangles

By Jose Novicio

TALK 'N TEXT shoots for a second straight win over Barangay Ginebra in today's Gran Matador PBA Philippine Cup Finals at the Araneta Coliseum with the payment of a Game 1 forfeiture dangling over its head.

The Phone Pals used the stick of pulling their 89-71 victory in the opener of the best-of-seven championship series to waste after fielding in ex-Taulava, who, despite a scare order allowing him to play, has been rendered ineligible by the league.

PBA Commissioner Noli Eala is set to decide on the ruled outcome of Game 1 late last night after the Gin Kings lodged a protest card the Phone Pals asked to reconsider their request.

GAME THREE
(Araneta Coliseum)
(Game 2 of Finals series)
TODAY
7:15 p.m. — TNT vs Ginebra
(Game 1 tied 1-1 in Ginebra's favor)
(Series: Ginebra leads 89-71)

"We'll definitely appeal," said Talk 'N Text coach Joel Banal. "It's their turn (Ginebra) to do that (file protest). But it's also our right to make Asi play. We will do everything we can for him because he's part of the team," Barangay Asi pug and Phillip Killley, who tied-ended on Ginebra's relief defense in Game 1, are expected to again contribute their scores with Pic Pichie, Mark Telan, Yancy De Ocampo and Taulava.

"We improve the team...the presence a more pure backup (of Asi) will give us a lot (of) boost in terms of reserves," said Banal. "Above the rest, we can't do anything about it. Our focus is on the game."

After a two-day rest, the Gin Kings have probably regained their health and made adjustments on their shortcomings in Game 1.

"We're going to score our average, hence," said Barangay Ginebra coach Bal Sinagapore. "We'll be a hundred percent and see where the chips fall."

TAULAVA (right) and Andy Seigle jockey for position in Game One.

No violation on fielding of Taulava—TNT

TALK 'N TEXT maintained yesterday that it has not committed any violation that would justify any sanction or penalty from the Philippine Basketball Association (PBA) concerning the TNT Phone Pals' fielding of Fred Jun Taulava in Game 1 of the 29th Philippine Cup finals.

The club issued an emphatic 89-71 win over Barangay Ginebra in the opener of the best-of-seven series.

In its latest reply to the protest filed by Ginebra last Jan. 31, Talk 'N Text, through its PBA board representative Melvin "Baby" Negre, yesterday cited the reasons why the PBA cannot give due course to the protest.

While rehearing point by point Ginebra's contentions, Negre stressed in his letter to PBA Commissioner Noli Eala that the league would be violating the Jan. 20 order of the Quezon City Regional Trial Court if the PBA would penalize TNT for complying with the court's order to allow Taulava to resume playing in the PBA.

"In granting the same to the person would constitute a circumvention of the writ of preliminary mandatory injunction as it would allow us indirect defiance of the court order in the guise of enrolling a protest and imposing arbitrary sanctions and penalties," Negre wrote Eala.

Negre added Ginebra's claims that TNT failed to include Taulava in its roster in time for the league's Jan. 11 deadline for changes to be made to the lineup, that Taulava remains suspended and should not have played in Game 1, and that Taulava has not complied with the PBA's grievance and reinstatements.

Negre pointed out the following:

• That Talk 'N Text Team Manager Pranke Tan submitted to the PBA their lineup last Jan. 12 along with a letter (Annex A of Talk 'N Text's reply to the protest) stating that the team left a space for the 12th member reserved for Taulava. The letter made clear that the Phone Pals' intention to include Taulava in the roster except that he was still suspended then (Jan. 12).

• On Jan. 20, 2005, Lim sent another letter (Annex B) to inform Eala that by virtue of a court order dated Jan. 20, 2005, Taulava was restored to the 12th member of the TNT team pursuant to the final letter of Jan. 12, 2005. Accordingly Talk 'N Text did not change the said line-up beyond the prescribed period because the Taulava was named in the 12th member as of Jan. 12, 2005.

As to the allegation that Taulava remains suspended and should not have played in Game 1, Negre said that "pursuant to the court order dated Jan. 20, 2005, Taulava shall be allowed to resume the exercise of his contractual rights including the right to play in the 48 Filipino Conference and succeeding conferences of the PBA during the term of the Uniform Player Contract dated June 19, 2001 . . ."

WHAT'S INSIDE

Sixers wreak Pacers /A26

Cop-wannabe lands Nat'l Caddies

Scoop to hire RP Olympians /B12

CENTRO

PASSENGER VAN BODY

Pinoy bets to train in China for SEAG

By Marc Anthony Reyes

THE PHILIPPINES will be sending athletes coming from 30 pre-selected sports to train in China even as Chinese coaches are set to fly in to help in the country's preparation for the Southeast Asian Games this year.

Athletes from swimming, track and field, archery, gymnastics, shooting, table tennis, badminton, wushu, weightlifting and volleyball will be sent to different parts of mainland China for rigid training this year.

Philippine Sports Commission officer-in-charge Butch Ramirez yesterday said the country reviewed its partnership with China during his visit there over the weekend with Phil. Olympians Akiko Arroyo and former PSC chief Jacob Tuason.

The partnership, which centers on training of the athletes and the arrival of the foreign coaches, will be re-launched on Feb. 15 at the Philsports in Pasig.

GILMORE

The program's target is for the Philippines to top the overall title in the New El-Dee 5 SEA Games.

The national athletes taking part in the program will join Mr. Arroyo at the Hyatt Regency Hotel on Feb. 8 in a ceremony to formalize their commitment to winning the gold medal in the SEA Games.

The Vice Gentleman led a pledging session with business leaders last month, raising P110 million intended for the athletes' training.

WINNERS!

Paintmasters rally to beat Jewels

ANTHONY Washington (3) braces for a shot over a fallen Montalbo defender

By Jasmine N. Payo

THE WELCOME bench could hardly watch in the first half. And it took some reprimanding from coach Caloy Garcia before the Paintmasters staged a feisty comeback for a 73-85 win over the Montalbo Rosenthal in Game 1 of the PBL Open Championship E-soft yesterday at the Makati Coliseum.

"It was a very tough game," said Garcia after the Paintmasters posted their first win over the Jewels this conference. "We played so lackluster in the first half and I thought it couldn't get any worse. We weren't playing our game so I told them to be tougher defensively."

Anthony Washington, who was hardly a factor in the first two quarters, posted another double-double performance with 18 points and 16 rebounds.

"At least our mistake is tight now," said Garcia. "This is the first time we won three straight games. And we also showed that we can beat them with [Allen] Caidoy."

Enfiel, Magnolia PBL salvaged its campaign after beating Cagayan Gasan, 80-51, for a second runner-up finish.

Several Santos scored 13 points for the Wizards, whose bid for a second straight title was foiled by Welcome in the semifinals.

After trailing by as many as 14-26 in the first half, Elmer Nolasco sparked an 8-0 run to spread O-Sky 15 points during Welcome's pivotal third quarter rally.

Welcome stayed at a 28-17 deficit as halftime, but Nolasco teamed up with Marvin Ortigueza to put "Welcome" within a point, 29-30. It fell into Triple owning the lead via Welcome for the first time since the first period, 42-41.

Campana later shot three charities to put the Jewels back in control, 46-44. But the Jewels suddenly lost their offensive touch as they went silent in the last four minutes of the third quarter.

And while Welcome's advantage grew to nine behind Washington and Ali Dji the Jewels misfired their last eight attempts for a 58-48 calls by the end of the period.

The Jewels continued to miss wide open shots and easy putbacks in the final quarter, and the Paintmasters quickly padded their lead to 19 points, 61-40.

A Paul Lorenzo triple at the 6:42 mark finally put the Jewels back in the scoring board, 61-49.

The Jewels' frontcourt mentor's any better as they shot only nine of their 17 gift shots in the final quarter.

Comprun tried to lead the Jewels in a futile rally to close within seven points, 79-63, but the Jewels missed their last four shots in the final minute.

The Paintmasters also outrebounded the Jewels, 56-48.

The Jewels opened the first quarter as a frantic tempo that seemingly rattled the Paintmasters, giving them an early double-digit lead, 13-4.

The scores:

First game

WELCOME 86 FILIPINO—Garcia 13, Caidoy 11, Ramos 11, Alvarez 6, Vallacar 5, Nuesca 2, Jones 5, Ang 2, Go 2, Mendoza 6, Yabut 6, Cruz 6.

GRANBY COCOA 52—Alvarez 6, Gonzales 8, Gutierrez 6, Tolentino 5, Nuñez 5, Lacuna 4, Cordero 2, Bautista 3, Espiritu 2, Lim 2, Gervacio 0.

Quarters: 14-18, 28-35, 45-46, 80-85

Second game

MCI 101 84—Washington 18, Nuesca 16, Chi 14, Reyes 7, Ilio, Mejia 7, Ortigueza 6, Ian G. Garanzo 2, Enriquez 2, Reyes 0.

MONTALBO 80—Campana 19, Magpayo 13, Cuizo 10, Salvador 7, Ilao, Cunda 6, Guerrero 6, Lagrosa 2, Jumilla 2, Wenceslao 1, Nuñez 0.

Quarters: 8-17, 28-37, 50-48, 73-84.

SPORTSWATCH

Bautista to fight Thai in Hawaii

ITS ED for Pay "Boom Boom" Bautista's unscheduled trip to the United States. The promising 20-year-old boxer from Bohol who's trying to follow the footsteps of Manny Pacquiao comes up second best in 10 wild, pulsing the way for his scheduled bout against a Thai opponent in Hawaii on March 11 Bautista, who defeated South African Lucky Mabena in 12 round decision, had Saturday at The Mandarin Oriental and Jerry Cornelius will face Rino Pinsonnegger in a non-title main event at the Ramada Arena in Honolulu. It will serve as Bautista's launching pad in the US where his handler Tony Aldeguer, and trainer Abe Villaroza, hope to see more of him. Bautista is also targeting and fighting organizations like the International 118 Boxing Organization. Anything to lessen recent fire hiccup fights abroad where he is to remain pure. "I've fought in Japan, Korea and Indonesia, but this is my first time to fight in the U.S.," Bautista said in Filipino during yesterday's PSA forum.

Demolishing-legzad Dalawahan champs

THE PAIR of Fox Master Glove Demolishing and Mark Glove Ingrad swept their seventh and final matches against the fandom of National Master Elmo Bumpadad and Marlon Jimenez, 21-8, Sunday to rule as Interclub the final edition of BEC Dalawahan standard three tournament at the J & T Clothes Building along Aurora Boulevard in Cubao, City. The Demolishing-Ingrad duo actually tied for 1st-2nd places at 6-1 the MM Jaime Pastrolongo-Alden Hernandez team of 5-2-1 and 5-3 Dalawahan champ Arsenio Hernandez-Ingrad Jr. Zandueta.

Camp John Hay hosting Corporate Cup

BAGUIO is all geared up for hosting the 1 PR Corporate Cup at the Camp John Hay Golf Course. Just 40 teams of four players each can participate in the golf outing event where major corporations CEOs and high-ranking executive officials are involved. Reading fee of P10,000 is a basis of four players and the three is a reception round. See tournament rounds, opening night cocktails, lunches luncheon dinner party and awards dinner. Dave and others all three. Golfers at the Big Dollar corporate cup will be treated for the best for three nights in accommodation the hours. Entertainment raffle, giveaways and cash prizes are included, too. Tournament chair is Bobbi Mendoza with Boring Interior. Call or John Hay Club, and visit mechanics, the corporate golf draw for are behind this event. Deadline for submission of entry forms is Feb. 25 with the tournament proper on March 4 to 6 at Baguio.

Lower ticket prices for derby slims

WHAT WE'D Tell Nonito Donaire if we picked Ricky at Philippe Mega Cockpit for the Feb. 19 Pinoy-Filipino bout: Ricky, you're short! private event's reserved to PDSC and PSDI for general admission and ringside seats, respectively. Only Dranie's designs entry of Dranie Esperto and Jaris Marsh 14-May 6. Cook Darling of Jaris' Junior wins skirts score three perfect points during last Monday's Days 2 of elimination, to join the 11 undefeated Jaris from last Saturday's Division. The Entertainment raffle, giveaways and cash prizes are included, too. Tournament chair is Bobbi Mendoza with Boring Interior. Call or John Hay Club, and visit mechanics, the corporate golf draw for are behind this event. Deadline for submission of entry forms is Feb. 25 with the tournament proper on March 4 to 6 at Baguio.

Candelaria 7-cocker championship

SONNY Lopez of Blue Blade Farm and former Pasay City Mayor Jun Pedrosa, who both competed elimination round assignment, lead more than 70 finalists today when the championship of the 1 80-entry 20th Annual Candelaria 7-Cock Derby resumes at the Quezon Coliseum. Lopez's Blue Blade Gun Pablo entry Orlok Demeter fetches bathtowels, while Pedrosa's JP Blue Bird Square unleashes brothers to his birds that convert 12 wins, a draw and a loss during the 2003 between 1-cocker at Bulacan with Pangasinan's pride, Manuel Lol. Debuting more than 70 contenders in the entry points, the 5-day event is hosted by Chito Tinsay.

Round 1—1. BBL/Ming 2. Golden Treasure 3. Mick-Becky
Round 2—1. Blind Elerio 2. Sa Mukas 3. Bar-coby Flying 4. Diablo's Girl
Round 3—1. Dynasty 2. Re Lucky One 3. Drunken 4. Amorsolo/Pinsonito 5. Binicolan
Round 4—1. Dyan Rocks 2. Speed Ice-cartoga 3. Spinning Bullet 4. Volcano
Round 5—1. Supernatural 2. Pak of Seasons 3. B Cid 4. Never Enough 5. Sharp Dino
Round 6—1. Blazing Heart 2. Spice Girls 3. Wild Orphan 4. Angel Eyes
Race 1—1. Batang Cebu 2. Shen-Shen 3. Serendipity 4. Good Year 5. Lad Dancer
Race 2—1. Victoria's Secret 2. Apex 3. Speed Edmund 4. The Magician 5. Unreloaded 6. My Rottweiler

88 teams join Global Destiny caging

THE NATIONAL Youth Commission and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency have thrown their full support to the First Global Destiny Basketball League opening on Saturday at the Marikina Sports Complex in Marikina City.

"With the NYC and the PDEA co-organizer the significance of this youth-oriented project aimed at channeling our young people in a wholesome sports activity and away from the bad influence of illegal drugs," Art Sandoval, Destiny Cable undersecretary-vice president for special events and GBDL tournament director, said at the PSA forum yesterday.

"This is why PDEA director Anselmo Avenido and NYC executive director Dino Badilla have given their endorsement to the first global Destiny Basketball League," added Garchitorena of the cable giant's first foray into grassroots basketball development.

Appearing with Sandoval on the season sponsored by Agfa, Bali Ball and Pepsi were Global Destiny senior vice president Sarah Santiago and undersecretary Ilsa Ikeda. Said Cebu mentor Valmeydo "Sico" Badolato, who was tapped as the event's consultant.

"Organizing 88 teams from 11 cities with close to 1,200 players is no joke," said Badolato. "Expect some exciting basketball in the next 18 months."

The season-ender versus the boys aged 14 years old and under will come from Quezon City, Manila, San Juan, Valenzuela, Marikina, Mandaluyong, Makati, Pasay, Las Piñas, Pasig-go and Muntinlupa.

Matches will be staged once on weekends during the town-city phase of the tournament then twice on weekdends when it moves up to the inter-city stage. The course will last for 10 months.

Ikeda-ra, speaking on behalf of Global Destiny's Philip Chew, said supporting the cagefest is part of Global Destiny's social responsibility program. "We believe in social service, sometimes we're criticized for adding that cash prizes are also up for grabs.

"The champions of the First Global Destiny Basketball League will get P300,000, the losing finalist P150,000 and the third placers P50,000," Ikeda-ra said.

The tournament's opening ceremonies will start at 4 p.m. and will usher in the competition on Saturday at the Marikina Sports Complex.

CARDONA (17) Winning moves with a hearty price.

Cardona: Proven winner

NO DOUBT about it, Mac Cardona of ICTSI-La Salle is a winner.

But winning, says the King Archer, comes with a heavy price.

"I spend most of my time on the basketball court," said Cardona. "I need to stay in shape all the time because the competition is getting stronger and stronger. There's always something to improve on."

Known for his pesky defense and explosive game, Cardona proudly led the MVP race in the ongoing PBL Open Championship.

But ICTSI, which fielded the same team dismantled by USAP title this year, failed to make the finals.

Cardona, however, isn't going to let down by not winning the MVP title.

He has already proven his point.

"By making the MVP race, I prove that I can compete with the best," Cardona said.

Besides, he's also a winner in the real world.

Cardona, who has already won numerous awards during the hottest years, promised to even cut off weight, lower cost more income so he promises his dream to shine in the PBA next year.

Aside from his regular dose of "heartbreaking" pinches, Cardona is also powered by vitamins and mineral supplements from the General Nutrition Center (GNC) which is known for its total fitness program.

Like Cardona, Sic Belmonte of San Miguel Beer and Cora-Cola's Al Stuk also endorse GNC products.

"The brilliant thing about GNC products isn't about just taking vitamins and mineral supplements. Cardona said he's taking protein, mega-when, mega-mix, creatine, Mr. C 2000 and muscle recovery pills for maximum performance.

"GNC products make them possible," Cardona said.

All-Pinoy for badminton team—Ramos

By Mac Anthony Reyes

"EVEN if we never get a medal, we will stick with our Filipino players."

PBA Chief strong statement, Philippine Badminton Association president Jeffrey Ramos yesterday dispelled speculations that Indonesian players will lead up the country's campaign in the 2005 Southeast Asian Games here.

The former Pasil Lady lashed reports that Pan Ampo and Rudy Wahjoyo will be moved as Filipino-born in the SEAG on Nov. 27 to Dec. 5 as well as the claims that they represented the country in last year's JH Open.

"On the issue of the Indonesian players, they did not represent the Philippines. They probably stated Philippines as country of origin because they [flew to the US] from here," said Ramos in a press conference.

Ampo and Wahjoyo took part in the US Open with seven other Filipinos but Ramos said she didn't authorize them to don the national colors.

He added that only seven delegates from the Philippines will be sent to the SEAG in Manila in March.

Wilson in "March" Dena as playing coach, Ian Pennetrates, Andre Amulet, Lloyd Ecsoza, Christopher Flores, Eddy Bartolome and Mark Alvin Trinidad.

The Indonesians have been in the country training with some members of the national team for the past two years, according to Dena, who fully supported their inclusion in the SEAgood.

Ramos also hailed Dena's claim that the PBA board members with his training programs and countries his resignation last Nov. 15.

His court-quoted Dena's resignation letter as saying, "I must spend more time now with my family, especially with my wife who has a tumor in the prostate gland."

Dena, 52, is married to Aurelia Ramos and they have given the erstwhile national mentor "all the possible help, including summer coaches of his choice, but unfortunately the coaches asked to be relieved due to policy differences."

Ramos maintained that the national team is still intact and that a tryout will be conducted in October for the composition of the team that will compete in the SEA Games.

V-League semifinals begin tomorrow

SCHEDULE TOMORROW (2:30 p.m. at Ninoy Aquino Stadium)
(Cancelled/ cancelled at times)
No 6—4 (-3 left) 6-1 (RTC)
5 p.m.—UST vs FEU

SETS SERVED

That's what women's volleyball has become the last few seasons, thanks to Shakey's V-League, which rejuvenated the once dominant game into a lively sport that had the crowd clamoring for more.

And soon is what's in store for the fans beginning tomorrow when the Shakey's V-League second conference stages its semifinal round featuring the country's top two collegiate teams, a talented guest squad and a team packing a Cinderella punch.

La Salle, the reigning champions, takes on defending champion Lyceum, which lost last year's championship in the first game at 5 p.m. at the Rizal Memorial Coliseum. UST, winner of the inaugural staging of the event last year, collides with Philippine Sports Commission, a team handicapped by members of the 1999 UAAP champion squad.

The organizing Sports Vision Management Group Inc. expects the crowd to come in droves based on the fans' response heading into the final phase of the double-round eliminations.

SPORTS Vision Management Group Inc. president Emilio 'Jun' Bernardino (right) shrieks a point during the re-launching of the Shakey's V-League women's volleyball tournament in preseason MBC-13 at the PSA Forum. With him are (l-r) Virgilio Gregorio (left), Shakey's QPI, and Philip Efhchan, CEO of MBC-13.

VELASCO saves close on bagging the elusive gold medal for the Philippines in the 1998 Asian Olympics.

Scoop to fete RP Olympians, sports greats

FILIPINO Olympians who carried the country's colors in the quadrennial event from 1924 to 2004 will be honored during the SCOOP (Sports Commissioners Organization of the Philippines) Annual Awards Night.

All-returning Olympians, according to SCOOP president Eddie Mirasol of Tempo, will be invited to the event to be held in coordination with the Philippine Olympian Association, headed by Art Monteagudo, its president, and chair Isabel Dichaves.

Heading the list of invitees in the affair tentatively set Feb. 24 are boxers Anthony "Boy" Villanueva and Rolando "Dodot" Nolasco, the only silver medalists so far, and Leopoldo Serantes and Roel Velasco, both bronze medalists.

Also reserved to grace the occasion are Arianne Cerdeña, gold medalist in exhibition sport boxing, and Gephte Fernandez and Jess Lanuza, bronze medalists in demonstration event taekwondo.

They, along with deceased swimmer Nida Ildefonso, high jumper Simeon Toribio and pugilist Jose "Cely" Villanueva, holders of Anthong will be conferred with "Lifetime Achievement Award" for their heroics that did the country proud.

SCOOP is calling the attention of Ildefonso, basketball bronze medalist in the 1948 and 1952 Olympics, Toribio and Villanueva to represent them in the ceremonies.

Pitta, according to Monteagudo, is to honor all the surviving Olympians upon his words.

Among those to be invited are basketball great Gabriel Tapardo, high jumper Isidro Flores and shooter Enrique Brock, who saw action in the 1948, 1952 and 1956 Games, respectively.

Other invitees are sports legends like Carlos the "Big Difference" Loyzaga, former Sen. Robert Jaworski and four-time PBA MVP Ramon Fernandez in basketball; former Asian sprint queen Lydia de Vega-Mercado, Southeast Asian Games standouts Eric Buhain and Mike Thomson in swimming, Peregrino del Rosario and weightlifter Salvador del Rosario, a former world weightlifting champion.

Former world speed shooting champion Jethro Dionisio, two-time Tae Kwon champion Lorenzo Criselda Jr. and Austin Figueroa in archery and Mary Antoinette Rivero in taekwondo.

Olympians (20 old Chix Magazine of Monteagudo's Topnet office at 515-2052 and Ildefonso Makerers of SCOOP at 522-0406 or 523-2692.

Taekwondo tilt unfolds Sunday

THE COUNTRY'S leading taekwondo jins will see action as the Pekiti-CFC Taekwondo Championship unfolds on Sunday to determine the members of the Philippine team for this year.

According to Philippine Taekwondo Association president Rafael H. Aseniero Jr., winners of the competition will undergo rigorous training for participation in the world championships, Kora Open championships, World Unification Festival and the 23rd Southeast Asian Games to be held in the Philippines this year.

PSI-organizing committee chair Hong Chun Hong said those vying for national team berths will be made the to surrender to weight.

Olympians Donald David Geisler, Edwardo Go and Mary Antoinette Rivero will compete with other jins from affiliated schools and chapters nationwide, including the Armed Forces of the Philippines branches.

Competitors will be conducted in nineteen categories in eight divisions...seniors (men and women), juniors (men and women) and grade school (boys and girls).

The event supported by the Philippine Sports Commission, Beerac, Mlhi and more will give the jins the chance to display effective techniques and styles.

Martial arts enthusiasts and sports fans are invited to watch the tournament starting at 9 a.m.

Sixers tweak Pacers

Ginobili stars as Spurs rout Sonics

PHILADELPHIA—Kyle Korver made a go-ahead jumper with 6.5 seconds left, and Allen Iverson returned from a three-game absence to score 27 points in the Philadelphia 76ers' 89-88 victory over the Indiana Pacers on Monday night.

Korver hit five 3-pointers and finished with 17 points. Kenny Thomas scored 12 for the 76ers, who opened a four-game homestand and moved into first place by a half-game over Boston in the Atlantic Division.

Stephen Jackson scored 25 points and Jermaine O'Neal had 23 points and 10 rebounds for the Pacers, who lost their fifth straight.

Rockets 97, Celtics 94

In Boston, Yao Ming had 23 points and Anchitetty scored 13 of his 19 in the fourth quarter, leading the Rockets over the Celtics.

Houston blew a 14-point lead but rallied behind Yao, who scored 11 points in the first 2:37 of the fourth, to snap a two-game skid and move back to .500 on the road. The Rockets have won four straight in Boston.

Mike Davis scored 17 of his 20 points in the fourth quarter for the Celtics.

Hawks 88, Magic 79

In Atlanta, Antoine Walker hit a fadeaway jumper with 2.3 seconds left, and Atlanta beat Orlando despite blowing a 13-point lead in the final five minutes.

Walker shot 6 for 13 and scored only 12 points, but his jumper over Dwight Howard helped the Hawks snap a four-game losing streak.

Steve Francis scored 24 points for the Magic and Grant Hill added 19, but Hill's final shot as the buzzer beamed off the rim.

Tony Delk led the Hawks with 17 points, and Al Harrington added 16.

Grizzlies 98, Hornets 91

In New Orleans, Lorenzen Wright and Stromile Swift each scored 19 points and made key baskets down the stretch, sending the Grizzlies past the Hornets.

Jason Williams scored 14, including a 3-pointer that ended a 10-0 Hornets run in the fourth quarter, and Wright also grabbed 13 rebounds to help the Grizzlies win for the fourth time in five games.

Dan Dickau had 19 points and 11 assists for New Orleans, which trimmed a 12-point deficit to four late in the fourth quarter before Swift scored and Wright helped Memphis regain control.

Spurs 103, Sonics 84

In Seattle, Manu Ginobili scored 25 points and Tim Duncan had 21 points and 13 rebounds, leading the Spurs to their first victory of the season in three tries against the Sonics.

Tony Parker had 17 points and a season-high 10 assists for the Spurs, who have the NBA's best record at 37-10. The Northwest Division leading Sonics are 30-13.

The Sonics played without All-Star guard and top scorer Ray Allen, who missed his first game of the season because of the flu.

They also were without coach Nate McMillan, the son is Raleigh, North Carolina, following the death of his mother Sunday. The Sonics were coached by assistant Dennis Casey.

Clippers 96, Knicks 89

In Los Angeles, Elton Brand scored 24 points, and Chris Kaman had 16 points and 16 rebounds to lead his Los Angeles Clippers.

The Clippers improved to 6-2 with-out Corey Maggette, who was sidelined for the second straight game because of an injured collarbone after missing two last week with a foot injury. Keon Clark dropped to 18-14 with-out Allan Houston, who injured his left wrist in basically-vast left knee.

Stephon Marbury scored 26 points for the Knicks, who finished 3-15 in January, the worst month in the franchise's 59-year history.

All five starters scored in double figures for the Clippers, who have won four of five following a five-game losing streak. AP

KIRTLAND AFB/President George W. Bush is presented a numbered jersey by Detroit Pistons guard Chauncey Billups at the White House. Bush honored the Pistons, who won the 2004 NBA Championship. AP PHOTO

SAN ANTONIO/Swingman Manu Ginobili drives to the basket against Seattle center Jerome James (left). Ginobili registered for the Spurs as San Antonio crushed Seattle. AP

Technocrats seal NCRAA Final 4 cast

THE REAL Technological University Technocrats secured a 107-89 quarterfinal win of the Polytechnic University of the Philippines Blazers and clinched the last UAA Technical Capital Region Athletic Association Final Four slot Monday at the Pasay Sports Complex.

It was sweet revenge for the Technocrats, who lost to the Blazers (9-4 title duel) in another collegiate league recently.

RTA's victory was in title to seven matches and opponent 4 in a four-way to with the Colegio de San Lorenzo Griffins, the Emilio Aguinaldo College Generals and the La Salle Zamora-Olivarez.

The Griffins and the Generals have the best positions among the four teams in the semifinals, giving the two upside the top semifinal standings, and the crucial cause to best privileges that go along with it.

The Generals, with John Edward Macalma lit-ing a game high 16 points, completed dominant championship. Francis, 79-46, to end up third.

This is the first time that the Zorros are out of the semifinal picture.

Tennis stars help tsunami cause

HOUSTON—Andy Roddick, Tommy Haas, John McEnroe, Chris Evert, Mats Wilander and Jim Courier played a little fun tennis for a big cause Monday night, helping to raise more than $1 million for tsunami relief.

Roddick, who beat no. 1 Lleyton Hewitt in the semifinals of the Australian Open, defeated Haas, 7-6 (6), in the feature match of the event for the Bush-Clinton Fund for Tsunami Relief.

Courier, whose pro-tourism company put on the event, lost, 6-4, to McEnroe in the opening match.

"Everything's going very smoothly except for the fact that I just lost to a guy who has more gray hair than I do," Courier said about the 45-year-old McEnroe, 12 years his senior.

The Houston Chronicle reported in its Tuesday edition that everyone who trained on anonymously paid $250,000 for 50 seats at the benefit at the Toyota Center and the United States Tennis Association contributed $25,000. Former President George H.W. Bush accepted a glass check for $1 million.

Event proceed the current players who participated in the event.

ARMED Kournikova also joined the project and paired off with Dr. Phil McGraw (left) for the doubles competition.

BODDICKS Impressive.

"They flew all the way in from Australia for this," she said. "to top day, we never played charity events [during the season]. It was hardly fly away after a very disappointing loss—I'm sure he's not very happy right now—that's really impressive."

McEnroe said it's about players understanding their roles.

Andy Roddick gets a and Jim Courier gets it," he said. "Tennis needs to come to the fans. It's not a great game, obviously, and it's also very good for the game. Jim has credibility because he was there [three Grand Slams]."

The event was to help relief efforts in Asia where the monsoon, triggered by an earthquake on Dec. 26, killed more than 150,000 people in 11 countries. AP

La Salle women's tennis champs

DE LA SALLE extended its domination of DASP women's Interscholastic Tennis Sunday by beating Ateneo, 2-1, crown at University of the East (UE) Netbel University of Santo Tomas' bid of sweeping the twin-of-three championship series for the girls' volleyball season.

The Lady Archers streaked to their third straight women's tennis title, the most in the league since the sport was included four years ago. UST was the first DASP women's tennis champion.

Bernice Ardinico gained the breakthrough with Czarina Mae Arevalo beating Jerry Sepulveda in the opening singles, 6-0, 6-0, at the Rizal Racket Club in Pasig City.

But De La Salle took the doubles courtesy of Catherine Flores and Sherry Ong over Vanessa Go and Lady Krystle Encarnacion, 6-1, 6-3, before Michelle Pante nailed the title for the Lady Archers with a 6-3, 6-3 win over Denise Rose Cruz in the closing singles.

"We are very happy [about the result]. It just showed that we are really [serious, this being our third title in the young history of the women's tournament," said La Salle coach Roland Remo as he thanked team managers Bobby de Guzman, Vince Pacheco, and former AT president and La Salle sports director Danny Jose and the alumni who cheered the games.

UST, the defending girls' volleyball champions, won Game 1 of the two-of-two series, 25-17, 25-10, 25-25, 25-19, bounding for revenge on the UE girls in Game 2 Sunday, 25-15, 30-28, 25-19, 19-25, 14-12.

Semifinals kicked off to noon-weeks at the Santo Tomas gym Saturday and the Tigers and Tigresses, the defending champions, ahead of their way to a sweep of their first three assignments.

WORDS No longer an dominant

Tiger no longer above everyone–Els

MELBOURNE, Australia—Ernie Els says golf technology and a more competitive tour means Tiger Woods won't be as dominant as he once was.

"Everybody has become better players, technology has brought everybody closer together," Els said Tuesday at the Heineken Classic, where he begins play Thursday trying for his fourth win in a row at Royal Melbourne.

"I think he's had a very good start obviously, but I can't see him being that dominant again. The guys out there are a lot more confident, they've stepped up to their games. We saw it hitting it 80 or 40 yards past everybody else."

Woods won the Tsunami Tournament in Japan last November, then shot four rounds in the 60s to win his Target World Challenge against a 10-man field to finish the year.

Two days ago, Woods rallied from a two-shot deficit over the final six holes to win the Buick Invitational for his first US PGA Tour victory in 12 months.

Now Singh took over the No. 1 ranking from Woods last November, a position Woods had held for five years. But Woods has gone 38 majors without winning, matching his longest winless streak in Grand Slam events.

"Technology has changed the game," added Els. "Twelve to 15 years ago, before titanium drivers and new golf balls, it was a different game.

"At the moment, he [Woods] is playing better, and more confident. But other guys will be right there. I don't think he'll be that dominant again, although I might be wrong."

Els keeps pace with Singh and Woods by finishing in a tie for third, second, and a tie for ninth in his first three tournaments of 2005. Including a runner-up finish to Singh at the Sony. He took last week off for a holiday with his family before flying to Melbourne for his shot at a hat-trick at the Heineken.

"The tournament has been like a dream for me, but it's like anything: you never know when it's time to say we have no possible?" Els said before a nine-hole practice round on the revamped Royal Melbourne composite layout.

The course has been redesigned to a par 71, rather than 72, under a par four, a move Els called a "good move."

Last year, Els opened with a 66 in perfect scoring conditions, flirting with a 59 after he missed birdie putts on the final nine holes.

But he shot a 2-over 74 in the final round when a northerly breeze was blowing, just missing out a one-shot win over Adam Scott. Scott left a birdie putt on the 18th inches short that would have forced a playoff.

"Last year I had a perfect start, but I've also won this tournament when I've come from behind and shot 66 on the final day," said Els.

"I hadn't seen a northerly since the Presidents Cup in 1998. It caught me off guard, on the front nine I shot a 42. But I had a great back nine."

Els double his or anyone else will threaten to shoot 70 again at Royal Melbourne.

Last year in the opening round, more than 90 golfers in the field of 156 broke par and 60 shot below-better in the ideal conditions.

"How many times do you get a chance to shoot 59, but I had a golden chance last year," said Els of his course-record 66. "I hope not 11, limited 59 but couldn't get a birdie on the last two holes."

AP

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005
ENTERTAINMENT

NOTHING TO HIDE "My conscience is clear," says Lucy

Karen, Ces deny role in spreading Lucy Torres 'klepto' rumor

'Not just one person told me [Ces] has been telling people I'm a klepto. She was directly quoted. It wasn't like a friend of a friend of a friend [who was quoted]. The one who told us was the person she told it to. How reliable can a newscaster get?'

By Nini Valera

REMOS can be vicious and talk cheap.

Lucy Torres, wife of actor/TV host Richard Gomez, and broadcasters Ces Drilon and Karen Davila are now entangled in a controversy sparked by a rumor which has unsettled because of talk during a party.

The rumor said Lucy was caught shoplifting several times at Rustan's Department Store.

In a phone interview with Inquirer Entertainment last Monday, Lucy identified Ces as the ABS-CBN anchor she had referred to as the one stalking San Juan Mayor JV Ejercito during a gathering if he knew that Lucy was a klepto.

Last Tuesday, Lucy wrote about the klepto rumor in her column, in another newspaper and talked about it in an interview on "S-Files." In both instances, Ces was not named, but Karen Davila, an ABS-CBN news anchor, was named. Armed as supposedly being in possession of a surveillance tape from Rustan's showing Lucy shoplifting from the department store.

"I named Ces in my column and in the interview, but her name was edited out," Lucy explained. "In fairness to Karen, she had nothing to do with this [rumor]."

Lucy said that since Ces was not identified in her column, she was also not mentioned in the "S-Files" interview, which was a spin-off of her column.

"Not just one person told me that. [Ces] has been telling people that I'm a klepto," said Lucy. "She was directly quoted. It wasn't like a friend of a friend of a friend [who was quoted]. The one who told us was the person she told it to. How reliable can a newscaster get?"

SAMPLE

WHAT TAPE? "If true [and it, as a consider's, air

TELL LUCY: "I didn't assume it was true," says

Karen, Ces deny role in Lucy Torres...

From page A33

Not panning on gossip

Ces, in a phone interview with Inquirer Entertainment also last Monday said she wasn't surprised when she read Lucy's article, even as she denied that she had spread the Karen rumor during a party in which she and Mayor Jo Ejercito were among the guests.

"My friend [Monique Ignacio] called me and said Lucy was asking if I had discussed it with JV," said Ces. "I said, 'Yes, but I did not say that Lucy is a liberta.' I admitted talking to JV [about the rumor], but I didn't tell it to him as fact or that I assumed it was true. I asked JV if it were true.

"I told my friend to kindly tell Lucy that I was simply asking if this were true and I was not passing on gossip. Then I read her article yesterday [Tuesday] and there was the JV sentence, which is not true."

Lucy said she did not know Ces personally and that she did not expect the news author to come to a defense.

"She's not just a spy of the mill newscaster," said Lucy. "I expect a lot from a newscaster. For accusing that she said what she said, I cannot also accept that she's just throwing things lightly. If it comes from a person as responsible as she is, then other people would think it is the truth."

'She didn't start this'

In a phone interview with Ejercito, Karen Davila told Inquirer Entertainment that "Ces asked me if I heard about the rumor.

"In fairness to Ces, she did not say it as [fact]," said JV. "We were talking about text messages that were spreading the rumor. I told Ces [Richard Gomez] about the rumor. I told him I had heard it during a party where people were talking about such a rumor going around. Nanggang doon lang [It was only that]."

Lucy pointed out she was not blaming Ces.

"I accept the fact that she did not start this [rumor]," said Lucy. "How much I know, like did not connect this to her mind. It's just unfortunate that she was quoted as saying, among other newscasters in the whole of Manila who would have commented about it."

She said it could be small talk during a party, "but it still doesn't make it right."

"But don't just me," said Lucy. "You would never know how it feels unless you were in my shoes."

Clearing the air

Ces said that she's also a victim in this issue.

"In fairness to Ces, she did not say it as [fact]," said JV. 'We were talking about the text messages'

"I think I'm a victim here," she said. "My agency is I did not talk to Lucy when Monique called me. But I thought they would just see the message already. I told Monique that I remember asking JV if it were true because at the time, we were talking about text messages going around about Lucy. I asked JV because I knew he was a friend of Lucy's.

She said she had also sent Lucy a text message clearing her role in the issue. The text message, which she forwarded to Inquirer Entertainment, said, "Good morning, Lucy! Ces Drilon here. I read your article in the Star yesterday and was shocked to see my name mentioned in it. I like us well. Anyway, I'm sending this text because while I am the MD another you entrusted to who talked with JV I never told him Lucy is a libayan. I never, never assumed those talk going around. was true. I don't remember how your name cropped up in the conversation, but I do remember asking him if the incident at Boracay where you were accused of impropriety was true. I did not pass it on as fact. I'm sending this text to clear the air between you and me. I respect and admire you, and it's not my habit to pass gossip as fact. Thanks for the time. Hope you have a good day."

Gorra scored

Karen Davila also denied that she had a surveillance tape from Nation's shooting Lucy allegedly from the room.

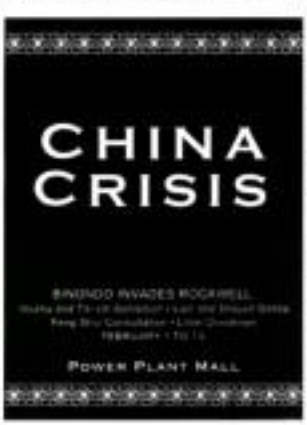
"What happened was Richard called me last year asking if I had a tape," Karen told Inquirer Entertainment in a phone interview also last Monday. "I assured him I did not have a tape and told him that even if we had it we would not air it on 'The Correspondents.' I also told him not to worry about us killing Lucy in (a video show Vanda San Pedro) *Un ArMM*) with Vic Lima."

Karen said she also told Richard that she didn't know where he was getting his information.

"But we ended the talk nicely," she said. "He even told me that if we had the tape, he wouldn't stop us from airing it."

Lucy said she wants people who claimed to have the tape to air it.

"My conscience is clear," said Lucy. "I don't have anything to hide."



PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER
WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 2, 2005

ENTERTAINMENT Metro

CELEBRITY TRIAL OF THE CENTURY

'I will be acquitted, vindicated'

SANTA Maria, California—Just hours before he goes on trial in California, pop superperformer Michael Jackson said Tuesday "disgusting" claims of child molestation made his life "a nightmare," but insisted he would be found innocent.

"I will be acquitted and vindicated absolutely [sic]," he said in a videotaped statement broadcast on his website just before the actual start of what has been dubbed the celebrity trial of the century.

The trial was to start yesterday in the small central California city of Santa Maria, 10 km from Jackson's sprawling Neverland home and amusement park where he is alleged to have sexually molested a cancer-stricken 13-year-old boy two years ago.

One of the world's best known entertainers, Jackson, 46, will become the first black male actor of the people who will be given the power to put him behind bars, as the court starts the lengthy process of selecting 12 jurors from a list of 3,000 prospective candidates.

Jackson angrily dismissed accusations leaked from grand jury sessions in which the now 15-year-old accuser told in graphic detail how the controversial star allegedly fondled him and plied him with alcohol.

'Ugly, malicious'

"In the last few weeks, a large amount of ugly, malicious information has been released into the media about me," Jackson said in the brief videotaped statement.

"Apparently, this information was leaked through transcripts to a grand jury proceeding where neither my lawyers, nor I, were supposed. This information is disgusting and false," said Jackson, who was pictured wearing a bright blue shirt.

Jackson said he had wanted to help the cancer-stricken boy whom he invited him and his family to Neverland.

"I allowed this family into my home because they told me their son was ill with cancer and needed my help. Through the years, I have helped thousands of children who were ill or in distress."

JACKSON: "When the truth is told"

A father of three, Jackson said the "worries have caused a nightmare for my family, my children and me. I never intend to place myself in an vulnerable position again."

He also pleaded for fairness.

"I trust [my community and] I have great faith in our justice system. Please keep an open mind and let me have my day in court. I deserve a fair trial like every citizen in these United States."

Jackson has pleaded innocence, and claims the accusations are "a big lie" concocted by a greedy family.

The case has drawn worldwide attention because of the superstar status of the defendant, known for his catchy tunes, "Moonwalk" steps and signature sequin-studded jacket, also for his eccentric behavior and frequent plastic surgery.

Megabucks

He had already been accused of child molestation in 1993, but settled the case out of court in a multimillion-dollar deal.

His fans everywhere wondered if the "King of Pop" could survive a child, and point out he is like a child himself. His Neverland ranch is named after the fictional magical kingdom of Peter Pan, the storybook boy who would not grow up.

A small group of fans ran up their cars outside the gates of Neverland Sunday, saying they wanted to show their love and support for the embattled star.

One car had the word "MISS U2U" written on its side.

"Michael has nothing to hide because nothing happened," said Nicolas Stergiopoul, 34, who traveled from Amsterdam to show his support.

The fans plan to stand outside the Santa Maria courthouse during the trial.

Last week, Jackson delighted supporters by dancing briefly atop his car after arriving 30 minutes late for his arraignment.

But tough-talking Judge Rodney Melville made it clear he would brook no such nonsense this time around, and has also warned lawyers to behave as the eyes of the world would be on his courtroom.

AFP

'Hide and Seek' shows up on top of box office

LOS ANGELES—Robert De Niro's flight flick "Hide and Seek" had a strong debut in its opening weekend, taking in $22 million to become the top movie and beating off a rash of Academy Awards contenders.

The premiere weekend's No. 1 movie, Jennifer Lopez's road trip comedy "Are We There Yet?", slipped to second place with $17 million. Rising six to No. 3 was Jamie Foxx's "Ray," which took in $10.1 million, according to studio estimates Sunday.

Newcomer Clint Eastwood's "Million Dollar Baby" led Oscar hopefuls with $1.4 million, coming in at No. 8 during its first weekend of wide release and raising its total domestic gross to $21.1 million.

"Million Dollar Baby" is in a neck-and-neck race for Best Picture and Best Director at the Oscars with Martin Scorsese's "The Aviator," which was No. 4 for the weekend with $7.3 million, pushing its total to $68.2 million.

"Hide and Seek" received harsh reviews, but like many other Fight Films, it drew the faithful horror crowd, which is rarely dissuaded by critics if a movie looks like it has some diverse scares.

Horror films often nosedive in their second weekend, but De Niro's previous could give "Hide and Seek" some staying power, said Bruce Snyder, head of distribution for 20th Century Fox, which released the movie.

De Niro plays a father in the film trying with the potentially murderous "imaginary friend" of his daughter, played by Dakota Fanning.

Released other wide last Friday through Sunday at North American theaters, according to Exhibitor Relations Co. Inc.:

1) "Hide and Seek"—$22 million
2) "Are We There Yet?"—$17 million
3) "Million Dollar Baby"—$1.4 million
4) "Coach Carter"—$9 million
5) "Meet the Fockers"—$7.4 million
6) "The Aviator"—$7.3 million
7) "Ray"—$6.1 million
8) "In Good Company"—$6.1 million
9) "Racing Stripes"—$6 million
10) "Beneath the Pretense"—$4.2 million

AP

PC BUYER'S GUIDE
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Globe profit up 10% to ₱11.3B in '04

By Clarissa S. Batino

GLOBE Telecoms Inc. yesterday announced a net profit of ₱11.3 billion for 2004, up by only 9.7 percent from ₱10.3 billion the previous year as the company failed to hook up more subscribers in the last quarter despite spending aggressively on marketing and promotions.

At the same time, the joint venture between Ayala Corp. and Singapore Telecom Ltd. investors offered to buy back Globe shares at ₱950 each, a ₱88 premium to yesterday's close of ₱862.

Subscribers to Globe and its other brand Touch Mobile reached 12.6 million in end-2004, up 2.0 million from the previous year.

But the quarterly figures showed that Globe posted a sharp growth slowdown, during the fourth quarter when the company added a net of only 800,000 subscribers during a traditionally peak Christmas season.

The company lured in 1.4 million customers during the second quarter and 1.2 million in the third quarter of 2004.

Stock analysts see expecting market players to sell Globe shares today, which could drag down the company's stock price.

"The buyback offer is meant to avoid a steep drop in share prices following its disappointing 2004 profit. It could prop up Globe's share price," said one analyst at a local brokerage house.

Globe said that it will shareholders would avail themselves of the buyback offer, the company could retire 9.3 million common shares equivalent to 6.67 percent of the outstanding capital stock.

The country's second-biggest phone company is also retiring 12 million treasury shares acquired in 2003 from Deutsche Telekom Asia. In effect, Globe is reducing the number of shares available in the market to boost earnings per share.

Globe president Gerardo Ablaza said he did not consider 2004 a bad year for Globe. He said the company achieved a lot in terms of reducing debt and creating revenue savings.

Globe's long-term debt dropped to ₱51 billion last year from ₱66 billion in 2003. Of the total, ₱4 billion are falling due this year, ₱20 billion spread out between 2006 and 2008 and the remaining ₱27 billion due in 2009.

"We are buying back shares to optimize Globe's capital structure. This is expected to enhance shareholder value as it will further improve what is already a strong return on equity and earnings per share performance," Ablaza said.

The company also increased its dividend to ₱20 per share from ₱18 the previous year.

Globe chief financial officer Emilio Gonzalez said the company's profit in the last quarter was stronger than the third quarter but lower than the year-ago figure.

Neda warns against ₱125 wage hike

By Michelle V. Remo

THE NATIONAL Economic and Development Authority has thumbed down the proposal to implement a ₱125 across-the-board wage increase, arguing that it would be disadvantageous to the country's fragile economy.

The wage increase being sought by workers in the private sector is aimed at easing the burden caused by rising prices of basic commodities and services, but the Neda said that the adjustment would, ironically, only worsen the situation.

In a statement, the Neda said the proposed wage hike would only result in higher unemployment rate, higher inflation rate, and slow down the economy's gross domestic product (GDP) growth.

Mahdiarlan Gaerlan, head of the Neda's policy and planning division, said unemployment would rise by 3.55 percentage points if the wage increase would be implemented because companies in general could not afford it. The figure means that 1.1 million to 1.5 million more Filipinos will be jobless upon implementation of the wage adjustment, she said.

The Neda official also said that a wage increase was likely to cause inflation to hit as much as 7.9 percent and pull down GDP growth by a 2.07 percentage points.

NEDA/ B3

IPO IN MID-MARCH

SM holding firm to go public

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

SM INVESTMENTS Corp. (SMIC), the holding company of mall magnate Henry Sy Sr., has filed an application with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) for its maiden stock offering.

The actual size of the offering has yet to be set.

Investors close to the Sy family said SMIC's mall to go public was spurred by recent growth potential in the stock market.

Year to date, the benchmark Philippine Stock Exchange composite index (Phisix) gained 9.3 percent.

From December 2003 to end-2004, the Phisix soared 26.3 percent.

In a preliminary prospectus filed with the SEC, SM Investments said it might offer up to 20 percent of its expanded number of outstanding shares. For the minimum offer of 15 percent of its capital base, SMIC may sell 75 billion new shares.

The shares will be sold in both the local market and abroad.

SMIC is tapping Macquarie Securities (Asia) Pte. Ltd. as global coordinator for the international offer, and BDO Capital & Investment Corp. for the domestic offering.

The domestic offering is set for March 8 to March 16. The offer price is expected to be at least P100 per share. The minimum price has yet to be set.

In the prospectus, the company said it was expecting to raise roughly P17.25 billion in gross proceeds from the offering. Deducting fees and other expenses, net proceeds were estimated at about P16.02 billion.

SMIC has interests in commercial centers through mall developer SM Prime Holdings Inc., and financial services and banking through Banco de Oro Universal Bank.

Three of its subsidiaries are already listed, namely: SM Prime Holdings (52.6 percent owned), SM Development Corp. (58 percent owned) and Banco De Oro (41.2 percent).

As of Dec. 31, SMIC's consolidated revenues stood at P94.3 billion, largely from its retail business which accounted for P26.6 billion. The balance of revenue was from rent and cinema ticket sales. Net income as of end-December was P3.9 billion.

The listing date for SMIC shares was set for March 22. Proceeds from the public offering will be used to finance projects related to tourism, leisure and property development (estimated at P12.1 billion) and repay a portion of existing loans (roughly P1.82 billion).

PSE, BOI to get more firms to go public

By Elizabeth L. Sanchez

THE PHILIPPINE Stock Exchange (PSE) is preparing to enter into an agreement with the Board of Investments to encourage more big companies to go public.

PSE president Francis Lim said he was in the process of drafting a memorandum of agreement with the BOI to gather more data on companies mandated to conduct initial public offerings.

"It's payback time. But it has its: those companies availing themselves of the incentives from the government, they should give their fair share to the investing public," Lim said.

The Omnibus Investments Code or Executive Order 226, enacted in 1987, requires that 10 percent of the shares of BOI-registered companies be held by the public within 10 years from registration.

To date, about 5,000 firms are registered with the BOI.

Companies that have expressed plans to conduct initial public offerings this year include cable utility firm Manila Water Co., independent power producer First Generation Holdings Corp. and personal products manufacturer Splash.

P9.8B in movie, music disc sales lost to piracy

By Ronnel W. Domingo

THE FIGHT against audio and video disc piracy goes high-tech as the Optical Media Bureau yesterday signed a pact with a global music industry watchdog on the use of forensic equipment that would trace where illegal disc copies were made.

Also yesterday, the OMB reported that total of P9.8 billion in movie and music disc sales were lost to piracy in 2004.

The agreement signed by the OMB and the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry would allow the bureau to use IFPI's forensic facilities in London.

The Zurich-based IFPI is a non-profit international association that represents the recording industry worldwide. It has at least 1,450 members in 75 countries, as well as affiliated industry associations in 48 countries.

Robert Ivrull, coordinator of IFPI's regional anti-piracy enforcement efforts in Southeast Asia, said the facilities were used to examine microscopic marks that mass production machines leave on compact discs.

"These marks are much like people's fingerprints or identifying marks left on bullet slugs so they go through barrels," Ivrull explained.

Ivrull, a former detective in the Hong Kong Police Force, said fraudulent data was a means of setting back-of-optical disc pirates.

"The Philippines, like some of its neighbors in the region, is a manufacturing base mainly because its production capacity exceeds local demand," he said.

Ivrull lauded the OMB for having shifted its approach to piracy from enforcement strategies, "focusing the enforcement efforts not only on raiding retail stalls of pirated products but also getting a firm grip" on how pirates operate their business.

He said the OMB's use of IFPI's forensic methodology would be a "great leap forward" in the fight against criminal syndicates.

According to IFPI, the production of unlicensed compact discs was a big business and is done by organized criminal groups since a replicating machine cost $1 million in investment.

So far, he said, OMB dealt like filmmakers and the agency now had law-enforcement powers as the engineering rules governing its operations took effect yesterday.

Montano said that over the past four months, the OMB has seized pirated CDs of both sounds and movies at an average of 500,000 pieces a month.

OMB's biggest haul, he said, was 4,00,000 pieces which were confiscated during a raid in Quiapo last December.

DOTC data showed that the cities added to Quiapo were raided at 50,000 pieces each. A forensic probe indicated that many of these might have been made in Malaysia.

DISCLOSURES

PCIB, Commercial Banking Corp. reported that the purchase of some 425 million shares of Yuchengco Group in Pan Malayan Leasing Holdings Inc. (PMLH) at P1.2750 per share, subject to Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas approval.

* * *

BANK of the Philippine Islands said its stock and transfer book would be closed 30 days before its April 7 annual stockholders' meeting, or starting March 8.

* * *

MANILA Jockey Club Inc. and the Manila Jockey Club Inc. Employees' Cooperative Labor Union entered into a collective bargaining agreement, effective July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2009.

* * *

PILIPINO Telephone Corp. reset its annual stockholders' meeting from April 29 to May 9. Record date is March 11. *Compiled by C.J. Yap, PDI Research*

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Consunjis' money machine

THE CONSUNJIS should enter a status in front of Jose Antonio Leviste, the Board of Investments governor who spoke to the Consunji-controlled Semirara Coal Corp. on behalf of the government's National Development Co.

Leviste, the husband of Loren Legarda, just handed the Consunjis a windfall of more than P1.15billion.

How?

Only mid-year last year, the NDC and the state's Development Bank of the Philippines (and to new 22.7 percent of the publicly listed Semirara Coal Corp.

At a watch of a three-step decrease capital increase-stock dividend, the NDC and DBP stake has now been reduced to about 6.86 percent of the country's largest coal producer, after NDC and DBP declined to subscribe to the capital call of P13.66 million.

Actually, all DBP and NDC needed to shell out was less than P4.3 million to maintain their combined percentage shareholdings.

But with DBP, NDC, and the rest of the minority shareholders like former Ceramic Bank Governor Jaime Laya declining the capital call, the Consunjis ended up gobbling and paying for the entire offering. And as a result, the Consunjis' DMCI Holdings, another publicly listed concern, came to control 99.32 percent of Semirara, up from 74.36 percent.

Here's the kicker.

Thus P1/share the NDC and DBP turned down in the third quarter last year is now being offered by the Consunjis to the secondary market for a whopping P36 a share.

And the NDC, never mind DBP, the government is subscribe to its proportionate shareholding of 4,135,126 shares at P1/share, equivalent to 413,512,260 shares after Semirara declared a 900 percent stock dividend, that P414 million would now be worth more than P1.5 billion.

Instead, that windfall went to DMCI. And this, including the 115 million Semirara shares DMCI is unloading for a total of P4.1 billion, explains why DMCI share price is now shooting through the roof.

Incidentally, in addition to Leviste, former Finance Undersecretary Vicky Macalalag, husband of former DBP chair Reinoldus Macalalag, Cesar Buenaventura, Federico Pasa, and engineer Eduardo Malaluc also sit on the Semirara board, along with, of course, the Consunjis.

Malaluc, are undersecretary representing NDC seeks seamless board, just like Leviste.

DBP because of its small stake, has no board representation.

Semirara, currently suspended because of the secondary offering, resumes trading on Friday.

Having the last laugh

At about this time last year, retired Bangko Sentral Governor Gabriel Singson had to hide his face behind a napkin during a Citigroup regional investment forum, where every speaker to a man were bullish on Southeast Asia except the Philippines.

With the local stock market churning out the second highest gain in the region and the economy posting a respectable 0.1 percent growth last year, the former law professor now has talent to passing an impish question, like what he did during last week's investment forum in Hong Kong, also hosted by Citigroup: "Where did you chop-chop?"

After an embarrassed laugh from the suit brigade, Singson apologized for the harsh question, and theatrically rephrased his question to, "I mean, what did the Philippines do right?"

Fast food gone fast

DOST go around looking for a quick fix at the Greenbelt 3 fast food area. There to note.

Indeed, even the fast food malls are gone.

The various concessionaires had packed up after serving their last meals on Monday. According to one shop owner, the entire area will be transformed into another higher-end restaurant row, similar to those now lining up the first and second floors of Greenbelt 1.

Apparently, brothers Ayala Land a renovating all the cheap eats to the old Greenbelt, closer to the office buildings, or to Glorietta, on the other side of Makati Avenue.

Heard it through the grapevine

AMBASSADOR to the United Kingdom Edgardo Espiritu may be transferred to Ukraine from London to pave the way for the appointment of Undersecretary Jesus Brendan Antonio Lagdameo in his stead.

It is not clear where the current ambassador to Moscow, Ernesto Llamas, would be reassigned after the putative transfer.

In addition to the Russian republic, the country's ambassador to Moscow also has jurisdiction over former Soviet client states Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan.

Email: cocktales_pdi@yahoo.com or cocktales.pdi@inquirer.com.ph

Neda warns against . . .

To Page 2/B2

The figures were determined through a simulation made by the Neda. The study was shared with the Department of Labor and Employment, National Wages and Productivity Commission (DOLE-NWPC), which represents the department in House of Representatives hearings on the legislated wage increase in House Bill 345.

Under House Bill 345 authored by Zamboanga Rep. Rosilin Barteaga, who is also chair of the House labor and employment committee, all private sector employees, whether agricultural or industrial/retail, are to be given a P125 daily wage increase. The amount will be on top of any existing wage increase, wage increase self-imposed by a company and pay hike resulting from regularization of employment.

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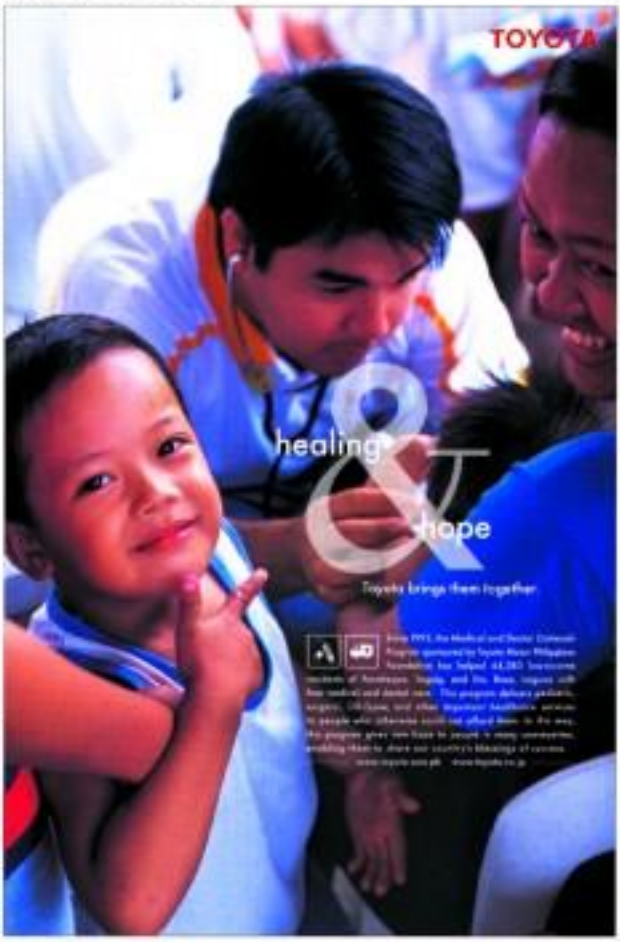

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5.00M – 9,999,999	6.750	7.000	7.125	7.500
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2bU! LIFESTYLE

2bU!'s Valentine blowout Part 1

2bU! hereby declares February as Love Month. Flowers, hearts, chocolates, gifts, dinners for two. Let's face it, Valentine's Day can take a toll on our pockets. This year, we decided to wave our magic wand.

It doesn't matter if you're cash-strapped or not, we want you to join in on the fun. 2bU! and close to 50 of our big-hearted friends have been preparing special surprises for you. In the entire month of February, we will be giving away hundreds of prizes—gift packages you can vie for your loved ones, dinners and dates you can enjoy with them and the promise of fun for your single friends.

We want you to celebrate your relationships in the most beautiful and meaningful ways possible.

This week, we start by giving away progressive dinner dates at Eastwood for 15 couples. There's more to look forward to in the coming weeks, we promise you.

Because we love you, dear readers, this is our Valentine's Day gift to you.

Settle down with our pages, list down what you want to win and amaze us with your contest entries.

We'll be waiting.

Prizes are just four steps away

Here's how you can win 2bU!'s Valentine Blowout

Step 1: Read all the 2bU! issues in February and pick out which prizes you want to win.

Step 2: You have two options: You can either send us your love story or a creative expression of love (scrapbook pages, greeting cards, poems, a CD of a song you wrote, a webpage—the only limit is your imagination). Or both if you really want to.

Step 3: Include a photo of you and your loved one, your name, age, address, school/office and contact numbers.

Step 4: E-mail your entries to contest2bU@inquirer.com.ph and/or thevalentineblowout@yahoo.com or snail mail them to Philippine Daily Inquirer building Chino Roces Avenue corner Yague and Mascardo Streets Makati City.

Deadline for entries is February 28. Winners will be announced on this space. Our favorite entries will be published in a future 2bU! issue.

ON CHRISTINE: Black lace corset, 32 BC. Silver ruffled skirt, to order from Tarah Gallos (0916.4965586). Crystal chandelier earrings and hairpieces, Get Happy. Silver sandals, Prouty Fit

ON NIKKA: Baby pink beaded gown, Chris Diaz (0918.3335094)

Little Women

ON NIKKA: Pink polka dot corset, 32 BC. Sequined shrug and aqua skirt, Maita Fernandez (0917-5318123). Cuff by Get Happy. On Mole: Sequined black dress by Karinsaden. Hat, Barnadette Mutuc; necklace (on hat) by Get Happy. Faux pearls, stylist's own. Emerald green pumps, Prouty Fit

Text and styling by Bianca Caminardi
Staff Correspondent
Photos by Sara Black

THEN they were, the dreaded words: "What will I wear to the prom?"

My blood boils. Ohhh, are mom was standing in front of me with the tragic expression of someone with a burning problem. Although I had always been thrilled to drive her to all sorts of outfits before, this time I was disoriented.

It took me a few minutes to remember that the prom was a standard trend for high school kids, and yes, my 39-year-old sister was a high school junior.

She was going to the prom with a date thinking out that some dandy asked her to his prom and an additional bond for me to work on found. After several unsuccessful attempts to convince her that bulky cardigans were the hottest things to wear this side of prom years...hey, what if some dude tried to look down her top?—I resigned myself to the sad truth of helping my sister change from little girl to young woman.

But then again, what is someone the prom, many high schoolers don't need any help from their elders (that would be anyone who's out of high school.) Quiet and demure girls morph into voracious, sequin-clad women with ol' cavalde battle plans laid out for their gowns and dates.

Then begins the labyrinths of hunting in search of the perfect fabric, and, armed with magazines and loads of worth, launch into the

ON TANYA: Aqua dress, Karinsaden. Pink sandals, Prouty Fit. Flowers from The Language of Flowers, Do Mole. White corset top, Maita Fernandez (0917-5318123). Silver gown (used as skirt), Karinsaden

ON NIKKA: White corset top, Maita Fernandez. Black and white skirt with petticoat, Barnadette Mutuc (0922-8837449.) Necklace and hairpiece from Get Happy

ON TANYA: Purple dress, Fraserup. On Christine: pink dress, to order from Miss Pucon (0911-4066005).

Styled with Happy David and Abigail Pucon
Makeup by Xiong Zuñeca of Shu Uemura using the 2005 Spring/Summer Resortus nude makeup collection
All accessories by Get Happy (0917-5-Happy)
Hair by Edel Ramos and Jet Bracilal
from Salon de Manila and Archie Severino for Shu Uemura

ON NIKKA: Apple green corset and skirt, Maita Fernandez. Pink sash, Karinsaden. Rose necklace and pearl tiara, Get Happy. Pink beaded sandals, Prouty Fit

DENIM waistcoat, dress and purple tulle skirt, to order from Miss Pucon. Ruby pink pumps, Prouty Fit

Prom-pretty looks

Text by Bianca Caminardi, Staff Correspondent
Photos by Sara Black

Meg

Your look is: Glamorous, a little sultry and lady-like

Nothing spells "woman" more than lipstick. Avoid looking like you swiped your mom's cosmetics by going for soft, natural shades with a hint of shine. Twist up your hair in a sophisticated updo and rub a little serum for a glossy finish.

Tip: Shu Uemura Lustrous Glow Lipstick, Red Head (Girl Says shine serum)

Jo

Your look is: Bored, carefree, not fussy at all

Its practical understated styling speaks that you can relax around everyone's—the media and the judges (ahem!); any adventurous and unwork-while the pose lines and adds a tomboy touch. Apply a lot of mascara so your eyes—and smart mind—will be noticed.

Tip: Shu Uemura eye pencils in blue and black, Devil-lined Contour Freak straightening mascara

Beth

Your look is: Sweet and demure, soft and pretty

Don't go too strong on the makeup. Focus on blush and lip gloss to keep your look sweet and soft. Curl your hair for an 1950s vamp-to-be look, and accessorize with hair flowers and beads or pearl ties.

Tip: Shu Uemura Lipgloss in Pink Lemonade and Orange Sorbet, Get Wave! Upright curl maker

Amy

Your look is: Artistic, expressive, and a bit unconventional

Play around with eye shadows to achieve different looks that can even go chic—don't be afraid to mix and match colors. Ignore the neighborhood makeup artist when he insists on red lipstick. Friends of your look will soon be flowing to you.

Tip: Shu Uemura Nouveau eye shadows, Get Wave! Creative Contour sculpting liquid

A WHITE rose from Designer Blooms to set the mood for the evening

APERITIFS at Shiva Grill breed preliminary conversations.

A WHIMSICAL carousel ride makes for spontaneity

2bU!'s unique *Valentine treat*

Text by Cheryl Tiu
2bU! Correspondent
Photos by Rolly Lorma

TO CELEBRATE the month of hearts, 2bU! will play Cupid and give you the perfect Valentine's Day gift. Extemporizing on the classic sit-down dinner, 16 lucky readers and their loved ones will get the chance to go on an exclusive progressive dinner date at Eastwood.

Designer Blooms will be furnishing flowers to set the mood for the night. The evening will then start with aperitifs at Shiva Grill for you to warm up to one another.

You can then carry your conversations over main course at Jack's Loft. After dinner, stop by Nuts About Candy for some candy last bags before heading over to the Eastwood Cinemas to cuddle up for a movie.

To cap the night, walk over to Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf for a gratifying quality time over dessert and coffee.

It will be an evening that deviates from the ordinary, but it will most certainly be the perfect way for you and your loved one to spend the most romantic day of the year.

For details on how to join, turn to page D-3.

E-mail the author at chiu_dominiquet@yahoo.com

Eugene Tan is the vice president of China Kim Ho. He is a young restaurateur committed the guardians of time-honored Chinese culinary traditions, which advocates new-vintage Chinese cuisine.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE TALK becomes more engaging over the main course at Jack's Loft.

A MOVIE awaits at the Eastwood Cinema.

Here's a treat for singles

LOVE is in the air as Eastwood City rolls out the red carpet for all singles, ages 20-30. From now to Feb. 20, 2005, all purchases or food receipts at any Eastwood City establishments, including Cyber Mall, Eastwood Cinemas, City Walk 1 & 2, and Style Cenicule entitles the customer to fill up a Joining form. All forms will be reviewed, and 10 lucky participants (5 male and 5 female) will be chosen. Each of the 10 participants will bring one single friend to the "singles night-out party" on Valentine's Day at Eastwood City. The 10 pairs will be treated to a whirlwind "dream Eastwood City date." Sign up and you might be one of the lucky 10 single people that will contend to a fun-filled Valentine's, plus a chance for a pair to win P10,000 in cash.

COFFEE and dessert at Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf is a gratifying way to cap the night.

I am now committed!

SAME time last year, Pam Pastor and I made a pact—that the next 365 days ahead of us would be the year of commitment.

The Talk 'N Text

Another year and a month has passed and I find myself still in the same desk, rushing my article to beat the deadline (which I'm not so good at) while Pam sits comfortably, sifting through paperwork while looking at her screen saver, an awful collage of her and her boyfriend, Arwin de Guzman, who also happens to be right beside her as we speak.

No, I am not bitter. It is never productive to be bitter. Even when I was backstage at the Sequence-produced bridal show last month at the SMC Hotel, I happily applauded my model friends who walked down the ramp as if it were their real wedding.

It became a dress rehearsal for soon-to-be-bride G Tongi and fiancé **Tim Wallace**, who are tying the knot this month in Boracay. The glow coming from the couple was so palpable, I hugged them for dress-rehearsal. I wanted to get a piece right then and there to give them their blessings. "I know it was you," their eyes seemed to tell each other.

What do basketball and love have in common? Despite the popular vote, the Talk 'N Texters won by a huge margin, because they focused on making the team better

Leap of faith and love

A couple of weeks back, I hosted a dinner for Stephanie Dobbel, Alex Eseot and RC Concepcion at my crew room, Embassy. The girls excitedly shared all the developments in their respective love lives (as they all love to do—how very "Sex and the City").

Steph was excited about her French boyfriend (who was coming over soon). If he asks me to marry him, I will!" she announced. Alex told us about the joys of her Spanish steady, while RC—ah, let's keep her love life confidential.

A week later, during Steph's despedida (again at Embassy), Shiela, her French boyfriend, announced that Steph was the girl he wanted to be with forever. While most girls her age would be skeptical about such a thing, I admire Steph for deciding to take the plunge.

In a way, her leap of faith (and love) is something to fresh and totally unjaded by the heartaches of this world.

"We make each other happy, and we make sure we make each other better. What more can a woman ask for?" said Steph, her eyes twinkling.

Singles, unite!

There are all inspiring tales of people finding **each other for the majority of the world that is** single. There's match.com—a website that **links singles and organizes group dates for sin**gles who want to shed off singlehood.

In the words of the Shakespearean poet of today, Carrie Bradshaw, "If you are single, after you graduate, there isn't one convention where single celebrates you... Hallmark doesn't make a 'Congratulations, you didn't marry the wrong guy' card." The group-behind-internet.com plans singles a reason to celebrate being—alone but not lonely."

Here Libs complements Eastwood is throwing a party for singles this Valentine month. They are going to treat 10 couples (or 20 singles) to a group date around their compound and treat them the Eastwood style was this Valentine's.

All these efforts are to show the world that **the single person is not insecure (unless one** feels it).

An unforgettable episode of "Oprah" featured a woman who had just been dumped by **her fiancé** *very close* **to the wedding date. In**stead of sobbing and wallowing in misery, she **sent out cards with the inscription, "Closer dis**tance you gave him the wrong finger."

(My sister **Michelle** just broke off her engagement, but she did it nine months before the date. She is now happily single—and relieved that she made that decision.)

Balls to commit

Just last night I watched the first leg of the PBA finals. It was Ginebra vs Talk 'N Text. The whole Araneta Coliseum seemed to favor **Ginebra, leaving every move that our players** Air Stalkers made on the hard court. We in the yellow-clad Talk 'N Text crowd (Manny Pacquiao, Kris Aquino and their friends were among the counselors supporters) were a quiet minority to the unexpected coliseum.

Despite it all, I saw how the team pulled it off. Every time coach Joel Banal called to **meet with his players, I saw how intense they** were in their game, listening to their coach give his pointers on how to make the game better and ignoring the jeers of the audience.

So what do basketball and relationships have in common? Despite the popular vote, the Talk 'N Texters won by a huge margin, because they focused on themselves to make the team better. Still in the spectator mood here. Commitment for loved.

Commitment to self. Commitment to career. Commitment to your beliefs. Commitment to your family. The list goes on.

Commitment is not just about giving yourself to somebody. It's quite basic and goes **back to the fundamentals...to yourself.**

It is taken effort and focus. Like planning **week-end** *watching* **for it to** *grow*; it needs constant attention and nurturing to make sure **the seeds are firmly planted and it grows up**right, towards the direction of the sun.

Thousands of hours, let us look deep down and touch base with our relationship to Commitment.